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Her Faithful Knight

By MAY CROMMELIN

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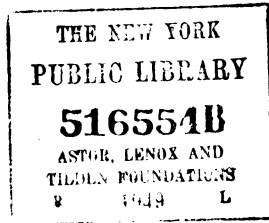
By MAY CROMMELIN[#]



"Give me a nook and a book,
And let the proud world spin round."

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HER FAITHFUL KNIGHT.

By MAY CROMMELIN.

HER FAITHFUL KNIGHT.

Book I.

CHAPTER I.

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A MIDDLE-AGED lady sat near the open lattice, through which came a mingled fragrance of wall-flower, narcissus, and fresh-cut grass.

The plain term woman would have grated on her ear, trained in the early sixties as Mrs. Dundas had been to ladylike words and ways. Looking at her refined features no one could dispute her claim to good-breeding. Also, judging from her still pleasing figure, the plentiful grey hair raised picturesquely above her low forehead, and her large blue eyes, she might have been, as she fondly believed, a beauty in her day.

But now her delicate skin was faded, and the wavering lines of the face were joyless, though resigned. Her tightly-fitting dark gown showed worn at the seams. She was busied darning a lace lappet with pathetic slow carefulness.

By the tea-table lingered a very different figure.

It was that of a red-haired, small girl, munching buttered scones and pouring out cup after cup of tea with a resolved air of prolonging enjoyment. She had twisted her thin legs round each other in a marvellous fashion. Sometimes she undid this double knot, but only to twine her limbs round the legs of the chair by way of variety. She also was ill-dressed; worse, her pinafore was guilty of smears and ink-stains.

There was an odd contrast between the poor clothes of these two occupants of the old-fashioned room, and the handsome pieces of Queen Anne and Sheraton furniture that crowded it; the Worcester and Wedgwood china piled in corner cupboards; the quaint, embroidered pictures; Cosway miniatures and flocks of black silhouettes garnishing the walls. Nevertheless, the carpet was worn in tracks; also stripes of the once reddish-brown curtains were faded to palest drab.

Outside, a delightful garden showed framed in the old stone window. Here a splendid cedar stretched wide layers of dark green shade. There two mighty beeches were making ready to burst into leaf. Lilac bushes and borders filled with old-world flowers already bloomed with promise of yet greater wealth to come. The paths were newly raked, and across the picture moved a roughly dressed man, dragging a mowing-machine to and fro across a velvet lawn that he had almost ended cutting.

Mrs. Dundas looked round at the little girl and said in a mild voice, like the bleating of a sheep:

"Keep some tea and cake for Alice, Tip. You know, she warned us there would be short commons for dinner. Don't gobble up everything."

"Gobble! I am never greedy, only hungry," retorted Tip, indignantly. All the same she left a last piece of scone which she had been fondly eyeing, shook the teapot, and poured in some more water. Duty done, she relieved her injured mind by a jeering outburst.

"And as to keeping tea, Cousin Charlotte, don't you know Alice is certain to get hers at Lady Marchmont's after teaching those sillies, Fusby and Mimsy, to say *je suis*, instead of *je sooe*! Isn't that all the payment she gets for being as good as a governess?"

"A lady by birth could not accept money from friends for her help," returned Cousin Charlotte, with a little shiver at the debasing idea. "Besides, remember that Lady Marchmont never forgets to invite your sister whenever the girls have croquet parties or golf. Then she gives Alice a good many presents, and you, too; and in such a nice way, always saying the things are of no use to herself."

"No more they are, or to anybody else. She just makes a rubbish heap of us, and expects us to be grateful," snapped Tip. "Rich people do give such horrid presents to poor ones."

Just then the house door was heard grating on its hinges, followed by a confused murmur of voices

saying good-bye. The door closed with a lingering rasp. Then light steps clicked across the bare oak hall and a bright-faced girl came into the room.

This new presence produced somewhat the effect of a spring breeze in a sick chamber. Mrs. Dundas looked up at once, her pale face lighting with a reflected sunshine. Tip capered to meet her step-sister, crying out:

"Here you are, darling. I've kept you some tea and a buttered scone. And who were you talking to at the door?"

"I've had all I want. Eat the cake yourself, Tip," answered Alice, cheerily. (Her little sister did not wait to be told twice, but promptly bit into half of the succulent morsel.) "As to who saw me home you would never guess, nor Cousin Charlotte either. Oh, I've got wonderful news for you both."

So saying Alice took off her blue knitted Tam o' Shanter cap, and looked twice as nice-looking now her neatly-shaped head was better seen, with its chestnut brown hair coiled at the back. Hers was a pleasant face, but too firm in features for mere prettiness. A square-set jaw; the mouth with sweetly curved lips that yet were pressed to a tightly strung bow that might loose sharp arrows. A strong, fairly straight nose; clear red and white complexion; a square forehead, and grey eyes, steady and large. Not tall, but strongly built, with a trim figure beneath a flannel shirt, shrunk in frequent washings, such was Alice Carnegie Bamfield to look

at. As to character, Mrs. Dundas held that dear Alice was a trifle hard, almost mannish. Tip pityingly considered her elder sister far too soft. Alice troubled herself very little about their opinions, having her hands generally so full of work needing to be bustled through quickly that there was scant time to ponder if a letter might be written more elegantly, or a naughty Sunday-school pupil should be "spoken to" with greater severity.

Now, in high spirits, Alice went on with her news.

"The Marchmont girls and I were on the links this afternoon when Dickie Marchmont brought up a stranger, a new man (or, indeed, two strangers, and two new visitors, but only one matters!). He and Dickie were at the same army crammer's last year and great friends. So, what do you think, he has come to read with his tutor here—at Fordhurst. They have taken the sitting-room and best bedrooms at the inn. His name is Mr. De Lacy; Dickie calls him Clareince, and he is simply delightful. He and the tutor both play golf splendidly, and they will be here till June."

"Dear me! That will be quite new life to us all in Fordhurst," chirped Mrs. Dundas, sitting up straight, with a gleam lighting her lately blank blue eyes.

"Hooray!" screeched Tip at the top of her voice. "But how did you play, Alice? Tell me, did you show those stupid maypoles of Marchmonts how to get over the ground?"

"Did I not? They were quite out of it," answered Alice, joyously. "And yet it is harder for me to be only playing with borrowed clubs—and different ones each day. Mr. De Lacy said it was a shame I had not a set of my own, and the tutor offered to lend me his for a match to-morrow. They both walked home with me, that is, Mr. De Lacy offered to come. Then the tutor shyly asked leave 'to accompany us.' The Marchmonts wanted them to stay longer. Oh, and what *do* you think?——"

Alice broke off with a gurgling laugh of intense enjoyment.

"What is it?" "Tell us the joke," cried both her hearers on the tiptoe of anticipation.

"He says he is coming *to call*! I told him Uncle Peter never saw strangers—was quite a recluse, and all that sort of thing. But he declared he would come to see *me*. So Dickie heard him and chaffed like anything, and bet him ten shillings he would not venture. And the other—Clarence De Lacy—said 'Done,' and declares unless I forbid him he will certainly call."

"*Here!*" breathed Mrs. Dundas, aghast. "*Here!*" echoed Tip in a yell of savage mirth. And the better to express her feelings her small mouth widened to a grin, and balancing herself on her right foot she held the left in her hand. "What fun! Won't there be a jolly row?"

"So I told him," explained Alice, gleefully. "But Dickie and the girls and even her ladyship urged him

on, and seemed to think it was no end of a joke. They must have made out that Uncle Peter was an ogre (that was when I went to the school-room for twenty minutes to correct the girls' exercises. Before my face I would never permit it)." Then with sudden dignity, in a calm voice: "After all, when you think of it, why should visitors not call here at The Grove as well as at Fordhurst Lodge? Am I not as much come out as the Marchmonts; and you, Cousin Charlotte, are here on purpose to play chaperon?"

"But Peter ought to call first. My dear child, we are not on the Continent. You and Tip never will get foreign ways out of your heads. It's not etiquette in England for strangers to leave their cards first," interrupted Mrs. Dundas in a shocked voice.

The sisters looked at each other, and their faces fell. Then Alice said, resentfully:

"Well, in that case I call it very bad taste of the Marchmonts, for they must have known it was not correct to egg on Mr. De Lacy—and after all he is only a boy. And though Uncle Peter may be an oddity and poor, nobody is more punctilious about civility and ceremony. If only I had known, I should have let them understand we were not to be treated differently to other gentlefolks."

"Never mind. Perhaps he won't come," suggested Cousin Charlotte, feebly. Then she shivered, for a sudden shower began to fall outside. Alice rose and closed the window.

CHAPTER II.

As the shower increased, those indoors saw the apparent gardener hastily pulling his mowing-machine under cover of the cedar tree. Then he hurried in a shambling trot towards the house and entered by a side door. He must have kicked off his boots in the passage, for next minute he shuffled into the drawing-room in carpet slippers, and dressed in the most shabby tweed coat, with bulging pockets, ever worn by a gentleman. For he was one. In spite of his grey flannel shirt, greasy black tie, and trousers bagging at the knees, the hall-mark of good-breeding was set upon him. As to age, Peter Bamfield bore his sixty odd years heavily. His skin was yellow and wrinkled, his eye dull. The hair that fell over his coat collar was though grey yet several shades darker than a straggling beard, cream white except for a rusty stain above the mouth, due to tobacco smoke.

"Where is the macaw?" he asked, feigning surprise as he looked round.

"What do you mean?" answered Tip, defiantly.

"I beg pardon. Could the scream that was heard

out of doors have been your tuneful voice, Tippity-witchet?" inquired Mr. Bamfield, with labored politeness.

Seeing this was meant for a joke Tip reluctantly forced a grin. Then with the impudence of a privileged family jester, the child replied :

"Nobody would miss my voice more than yourself. You know very well the house would be dreadfully dull if I didn't enliven you all sometimes."

Mr. Bamfield grunted derisively; for the retort was so true he had no answer ready. Whilst Alice and Cousin Charlotte suppressed their secret amusement, his glance fell on the tea-table, of which he fell foul with a frown—

"So you've been stuffing again! What on earth you women want with tea I cannot imagine, when you've just had your lunch, and you will have your dinners. Somebody calculated that most people in England ate just a wagon-load of food too much in their lives."

Mrs. Dundas opened her mouth in real dismay; then timidly closed it again. Alice gallantly took up the challenge, saying in a pleasant tone :

"Afternoon tea to us is like smoking to you, I suppose. After all, what we take now is so much the less at dinner."

"And Tozer says we'll have half rations to-night," piped Tip in her high treble.

"Oh, Tozer! Tozer! If we were to listen to what that old fool is always harping, there would be

wrack and ruin in this house in no time," grumbled Mr. Bamfield. "Just you leave the housekeeping in your sister's hands, missie. Alice is the man at the wheel, and if she doesn't always do things right, at any rate she generally makes a pretty fair attempt at management."

Whereupon the inaster of The Grove slouched out of the room. The three womankind eyed each other in silence till Uncle Peter's door shut, for he had keen hearing. Then they used their tongues softly.

"You spoil him, Alice. Why do you give in to him? He'll have us all living on a biscuit a day. I am the only one who dares to speak my mind to him," exclaimed Tip.

"Because you are only a child," returned Alice in a matter-of-fact voice. "But just tell me what would have become of us both if Uncle Peter had not offered us a home when mother died? That would have been starvation and no pretence. If Uncle Peter is as poor as he says, it was very generous of him, and we ought to be grateful."

"I am grateful. But to you, not to him. Because he would not have had me at all if you hadn't said straight out you would never desert me. And he wanted you for a housekeeper and as good as an upper servant, while I heard him tell the lawyer I was neither his kith nor his kin, and just a useless mouth to feed."

"You should not have listened to what you were never meant to hear. And he invited me because

my father was his youngest brother, and he was really fond of him," returned Alice, severely. "Now, do come and sit down to your lessons like a good child. If you idle in this way it will prevent me from ever taking an afternoon for golf, and you would be sorry to stop my enjoyment."

Tip pouted, hunched up her shoulders to her ears, but prepared to obey.

Mrs. Dundas uttered, plaintively :

"I was just quaking lest your uncle meant to cut off our tea in future. Thank goodness! he did not. Really, I could not have stood that. I should have said I would pay for mine out of my own pocket. One can't go altogether without any pleasures in life. And I always say a cup of tea in the afternoon is so refreshing."

"Yes, you do. You say so every single day till we know it by heart," agreed the irrepressible Tip, who had almost left the room, but put her head in again to offer testimony to the truth of Cousin Charlotte's assertion.

"Amabel, that is rude. And you shall just write out one more German exercise as a punishment," said Alice, in a particularly quiet voice, but with a stern look about her mouth which the culprit well knew, so vanished, banging the door.

"Oh, Alice, my dear! She is only a child. Really, you are terribly severe," observed Mrs. Dundas, raising her delicately arched brows till they nearly met her fringe of white love-locks. "Why, Tip and I are

always teasing and sparring with each other. I don't mind what she says."

"But I do. She's my little sister—at least I've adopted her as mine—and I mean to do my best in bringing her up to be well-mannered; at least I'll have a try," declared Alice, vexed. "Uncle Peter makes a mere plaything of Tip, and you are rather too kind, sometimes, Charlotte. It makes my task all the harder. Well, I must hurry up her lessons to-night, for Tozer wants me to help with the curry. If I'm not dressed to the minute for dinner, Cousin Charlotte, do keep Uncle Peter's attention off the clock."

"Oh, dear me! Yes, of course, Alice! certainly. Of course I'll be very glad to do my best. Only, I wonder!—do tell me if you think——"

But Alice had already left the room with her white brow puckered.

"I am right; I know that. Still it is rather discouraging to be told one is unkind. Well, if we were to mind what everybody says, nobody would ever get on with any undertaking," thought the young, self-appointed guardian with a mental "Heigho! Never mind!" that dismissed the brief annoyance.

The troublesome ward obeyed orders as to lessons, which indeed gave her small pains, for, as Peter Bamfield used to say, she was "as clever as a pet monkey." But when Alice called into Tip's room next door, to ask was the latter dressed for dinner, there came a refractory whine:

"Bother dressing! Uncle Peter never dresses, so why on earth should you make such a fuss about it? And it's only changing from one set of rags to a worse!"

"No matter. It is a good habit. You know mother always liked us to change. So did your father, when he was alive."

"But we had nice clothes in those days, and went to *table d'hôte*, and had real good dinners. It was worth while then," lamented Tip, struggling angrily with a hook that slid loose on its thread, nearly reducing its owner to tears of rage.

Alice came, as usual, to the rescue. Then, she hastily put on the same dinner garment she had nightly worn at The Grove for the past three years. It was once a handsome dressing-gown belonging to her invalid mother, a much larger woman. Now it was taken in all over; the hem turned up; the waist-belt tightened by several inches. Yet still Alice felt that she walked about inside that gown, not as its owner, but its tenant.

Certainly she and Tip must have been five minutes late (the child always waited to hang on to Alice's arm), yet strangely the grandfather clock in the hall, one of the oldest of its kind, only wheezed out seven as the sisters descended the creaking, shallow stairs. Perhaps Cousin Charlotte knew why, for she stole a distinctly guilty look at Alice from her seat at the ancient piano. Then, tittering without apparent cause, Mrs. Dundas went on picking out an air from

a faded manuscript apparently new to her, and struck three false notes in succession.

Mr. Bamfield, who stood overlooking her, instantly clapped his hands to his ears, with a howl:

"Stop! For pity's sake, Charlotte. I have been patiently trying to help your bungling for the last ten minutes. But now you are downrightly careless, so kindly cease torturing my ears and spoiling my good piano at the same time. You know very well that music is the one great pleasure of my life, and I can't stand its desecration."

Mrs. Dundas did know very well. She apologized profusely with exceeding humility to Mr. Bamfield; but rose from her seat with an air of sprightly success, a moment after smiling at Alice.

Unluckily Peter saw this. He was never very easy to please, and Mrs. Dundas, as he privately often complained to his niece, drove him more wild than anybody else.

"What on earth are you simpering at now, I should like to know? Giggling like a giddy school-girl, and got up to the nines with my best flowers pinned on your bosom as if you wanted to captivate a beardless youth at your first ball."

"Dinner, if you please!" proclaimed Alice, throwing open the door. Then as Mrs. Dundas, with tears of mortification in her eyes, passed in first in a rusty black silk, enlivened by a tiny bunch of jonquils, the peacemaker linked arms and gave the victim a consoling squeeze, whispering:

"So sorry. Too bad you should catch it when you helped me so beautifully."

And Cousin Charlotte perked up again.

Peter snorted at his niece's interruption, but he waited ceremoniously for even Tip to precede him into the dining-room. This was a low, wainscoted room with heavy dark rafters and a ceiling bulging downwards in places. A thatch was made in the woodwork of the wall, and on this Mr. Bamfield tapped, calling, "Hi! hi!"

The wicket shot back and an elderly cook, the only servant in The Grove, was partly visible as she handed in a soup tureen, remarking audibly:

"There's your vegetable soup, sir. Hot water and carrots, I calls it. For not a blessed mossel o' stock meat have I got to——"

Mr. Bamfield shot the wicket door to before the speaker's very nose. Then he solemnly placed the tureen on the table. Returning, he tapped again, "Hot plates, I say!"

The door opened. "There they are, but they're not hot, only warm, for there's not enough fire to heat both——"

Bang! Peter cut short the cook's discourse once more. Then he helped the soup carefully; not giving much, but handing each plate with extreme politeness. He still wore his gardening clothes, the only toilet rites he deemed necessary for the meal being a plentiful washing of his hands, for he was scrupulously clean in person. When the curry

arrived after soup, Mr. Bamfield eyed it disapprovingly even while sniffing its savor with some gratification.

"Too much rice by half—this is waste, Alice! sheer waste. There is more rice than anything else."

"There is very little meat," replied Alice, gently. She knew; for indeed there had been but three meagre slices for four people.

"Then give us more vegetables: they cost less. But rice has to be bought, remember, and *paid for!*" responded her uncle, tartly. And as he clutched a spoon in his wasted, clawlike hands and bent his yellow face over the dish, doling out the rice pickles reluctantly, three silent sighs were breathed by the female beings watching him.

"I want very little meat, Uncle Peter. In fact, I don't want any," said Alice, with generous impulse, when, after helping Mrs. Dundas, Mr. Bamfield began dividing the few, very few, brown dice in the middle of a sea of gravy, washing the bases of a snow white rice ridge. Next instant she winced, under a smart kick delivered by Tip.

"None? Sensible girl. We should all be much healthier if we kept to vegetables," remarked Mr. Bamfield. "Well, there is enough—more than enough—for me and Tip, so your share can be used to-morrow. Now, what Cassandra prophesied we should not have enough for dinner, eh? Tell me that?"

He looked round, but no woman answered.

Only afterwards Tip reproached her elder:

"What was the good of it? You meant to give me your share, I guessed. But I knew it would be of no use."

"You don't get enough meat to grow upon," answered Alice, ruefully. "But you are right, it is no good."

An apple dumpling now appeared, and elicited tut-tuts from the master of the feast.

"Three courses *and* dessert. Why, Mrs. Housekeeper! have I not often told you that two dishes are quite enough in our small household. You should have some consideration for poor old Tozer. Even the washing up——"

"This is my own making. I wanted to try my hand at it. And, indeed, uncle, the apples were all on the verge of being rotten. I had to cut out great pieces, so it was really saving them," was the quiet explanation.

"More than enough means too much; and over-eating is the cause of most people's illnesses. If any of you three get unwell, remember, you must pay the doctor yourselves. I can't afford him," came in crabbed retort. And a silence followed till Peter returned half the dumpling through the wicket.

Then Tip jumped up and placed dessert upon the table. It consisted of apples and nuts: the sisters always gathered enough hazel nuts in the

surrounding woods during September to last, with care, through winter and spring.

"Nuts and apples. I heard of a man who lived on nothing else, and he never suffered an ache from rheumatism till he died," observed Mr. Bamfield.

"How soon did he die?" asked Tip, pertly.

Dinner ended, the womanfolk retired to sit around a small lamp in the drawing-room. Meantime Peter Bamfield smoked his only pipe in the twilight, to save his sight, he was wont to say. Later on, his stooped figure entered the sitting-room, when he addressed the invariable invitation to Alice:

"Well, little woman! Shall we have some music to-night? Then we will end our dissipation with a game of backgammon, eh?"

Bamfield played the 'cello very well. Alice was only an ordinary performer at the piano. Still she was so genuinely anxious to do her best, that although she was scolded and often found fault with, on the whole her uncle graciously allowed she "might be worse."

Meantime Mrs. Dundas yawned gently, or apparently read an ancient book brought from the brown-backed, dusty shelves of the study. But she seldom turned a page, for a penny novelette lurked between the leaves. This light literature was one of her secret weaknesses, and Mr. Bamfield's scorn would have been scathing had he found her out. As to Tip, she had stolen to the kitchen, where she divided the time between teasing Tozer, trying to

outchatter that garrulous person, and helping to wash the plates.

By ten the party broke up.

"Lights out in half an hour, ladies," the bachelor owner of The Grove always called in gruff, attempted jocularly after the female figures vanishing in the shadows of the passage.

And they had long ago learned this was a command not to be disobeyed easily, in a house where old doors had wide keyholes and were shrunk, leaving gaps and cracks through which draughts and light found passage.

CHAPTER III.

FOR five years the inmates of The Grove had led a life hardly varying from the sample given in the previous chapter, except for the changes of the seasons.

As will have been noticed, they were none of them nearer relations than uncle and niece. A "scratch lot!" said Mr. Bamfield. And the manner of their coming together was as follows: Peter Bamfield got news in the sixties, when toiling on his tea plantation in Ceylon, that his lawyer cousin in London was dead, leaving him heir to little beyond The Grove, then let to a farmer on a lease that had still several years to run, whereupon he felt moderately glad. There was a goal to look forward to, however crops might fail. To go "home" in the end was his dream. Well, he could hope to do so, now; and to the home of his ancestors, the family seat which he prized, however ruined.

When in process of time he did return, the old house and grounds were found in sad neglect. Bamfield set himself with what energy fevers and foreign life had left him to repair this. Plainly he could not afford to marry, he told himself. Unless,

indeed, "money came his way." Then, for the sake of The Grove, he ought perhaps to make an effort to give up his bachelor freedom. But the money looked elsewhere, and Peter Bamfield was still single when, some five years before this story opens, he was summoned to the funeral of his brother's widow. Mrs. Sumner, in spite of her second marriage, had died in straitened means at Biarritz. And Alice Bamfield was her only child. "So why—when the silly woman knew that Sumner's pension must die with him, and he did die first—why need Minnie go and burden herself with a widower and his brat?" grumbled Peter. "These penniless people never look ahead, but expect their relations to make good all wants and mistakes."

As to Alice, the girl was his niece, and only near living relative. Further, Bamfield was greatly impressed by finding her sewing at her own mourning. He recalled how some years before, when not yet in her teens, Alice had "run" her mother's modest villa at Dinan and cooked an excellent dinner for himself, on the sole occasion when Peter took the treat of a cheap excursion across the channel to visit his relatives. "She is worth her keep, and she will have £80 a year of her own when she is of age. Besides, I am her guardian," reasoned his better self against the covetous objections raised by the worser. So he offered sixteen-year-old Alice a home henceforth at The Grove.

"You are very kind, uncle, but I cannot go without

my little sister. I promised my step-father that I would always look after his child," replied Alice, firmly.

"Stuff and nonsense, my good girl. Amabel Sumner is no sister of yours," fumed Peter. "She has got relations of her own. Let them see to her."

"They are horrid, I know, for I've seen them. Mother always treated Baby as her own daughter, and I love her as a sister; so I tell you fairly I would rather stay on here with the child and go out sewing to support us both than desert her. I've promised I never would, and I can't break my word," was the unflinching reply.

Then Peter, on an impulse he could never afterwards account for, gave way. To the day of his death this generosity in taking Tip to his home was the one supreme good action of his life on which he secretly prided himself. Whenever he looked at the little girl she reminded him thereof, and he grew to like her because the thought flattered his vanity and soothed any vague uneasiness after seeing funerals, or hearing uncomfortable sermons, or such like prickings of a long-numb conscience.

"All right!" he slowly replied. "Only—I can't pay for her expenses, mind. I mean her schooling, or her dress."

"I'll teach her: at least I'll *have a try*," replied Alice, eagerly, using her favorite expression. "And as to clothes, we must both just manage out of the twenty-four pounds you allow me for dress."

"It's plenty for a girl. And the remainder of your money, fifty-six pounds a year, will only just pay me for your keep. I shall be out of pocket by that little Tippitywitchet. However—never mind!" And with gloomy magnificence Mr. Bamfield waived aside poor Alice's grateful regrets, and renewed offers of working for herself and Baby. So it was settled, and Peter's new name stuck to the child and became shortened to Tip.

About a year later Tip sickened with measles, to Mr. Bamfield's dismay. He dreaded illness, but hated the introduction of a hired nurse into his household. Alice and the old servant, Mrs. Tozer, were worn out when Cousin Charlotte, who had come for change to the neighboring spa, impulsively drove over with her trunks, offering to help.

"You see, I've had so much experience. My poor husband was in a sick-room off and on ever since we were married. So I ought to know something about illness," she said to everyone with sad pride. This impressed Peter so much that he gave his widowed cousin sincere thanks, promptly accepting her services. It was summer weather, and The Grove was like an old-world dream of peace. Cousin Charlotte enjoyed a delightful room, and passed a few days in reading mild love-tales to the small sufferer, or playing "Old Maid." Peter Bamfield showed her his best manners, and excused all household shortcomings on the score of sudden disorganization. Fired afresh by impulse Mrs. Dundas be-

came possessed of a new idea; and she never could keep her ideas long enough in silence to reflect thereon. It was that she should be allowed to pay her share and stay on with Cousin Peter in order to "take out" Alice, who was now seventeen. "A girl of that age must be brought out in society, and it is absolutely necessary for her to have a chaperon, unless," demurely, "you meant to go about to parties with her yourself."

"What—I?" grimly chuckled Peter. He gave no direct answer, however, for a considerable while, then made cautious inquiries. Charlotte, he understood, had been staying in boarding-houses in London or the country since her husband's death. What might that cost her? Bamfield possibly might be of assistance by giving his cousin a better home and position for—well, about the same money. Then she would have the pleasure thrown in of county society and the companionship of a bright young girl. Eagerly Charlotte walked into her own trap; told her small income to a penny; totted up her expenses for board and rooms, deducting barely enough for dress and pocket money. Yet, she was surprised when, with a careless air, Peter said those terms would suit him very well. The simple woman "somehow thought" she had only been explaining the past; that with a relation things might have been made easier. But there! It seemed done. Cousin Peter's air was so grand, Charlotte dared not murmur a protest. After all, it would be mean of her to make a fuss, when

offering to come was her own doing. It would cost no more than the boarding-house existence, which verily at times had been inexpressibly dreary. And, meantime, she would reign as mistress at The Grove. Who knew——?

But in a few months Charlotte was vehemently denying to any smiling old acquaintance, who poked innuendoes half in fun, that "such an idea" could ever have entered her head. "For the man is a curmudgeon, my dear; that I knew from the first. Only it seemed my duty towards those two poor girls to go and be a mother to them. I don't know what they would do without me?" she repeated, bridling.

If Charlotte did not know old Tozer could have told her. For during that time of measles the old cook formed a pitying opinion that never altered of Mrs. Dundas's incapacabilities.

Afterwards, there was a smouldering resentment in Peter's mind against himself for not having asked Charlotte for more for her keep. She bore the like grudge against herself for weakness. Nevertheless, she grew used to The Grove, and became really fond of Alice and Tip. So her feeble anchor held.

Soon the poor lady's vaguely bright hopes of society faded. Fordhurst itself, the hamlet and its few neighboring houses of gentry, proved a very Sahara of society except for Alice's friends the Marchmont girls, their brothers, and the handsome curate.

"I do love to see young people enjoy themselves,"

declared Charlotte, with a heart-gush of sincerity, to Lady Marchmont. And with longing eyes she watched the merry little parties go off, on golf or bicycling excursions, then swallowed a sigh.

"You and I will have a nice quiet stay at home. We have had our good time," comfortably remarked Lady Marchmont in her high voice, over her high nose.

"Well, I can't say I ever had much amusement, either as a girl or after my marriage," sighed Charlotte, softly.

"Nonsense. I am quite certain you had no end of fun; and that your husband was devoted to you," declared her ladyship, decidedly. "And I always seem to hear of you and Alice going out to everything here. I always say Mrs. Dundas is quite frivolous, compared to me. Why, you went to even all the school treats and the old pensioners' Christmas Tree—whilst I stayed at home looking after my children."

Mrs. Dundas remained mute but a sense of unfairness rankled in her mind.

CHAPTER IV.

Two days passed without any visitors calling at The Grove. That was by no means unusual. Tip, who had been on the tiptoe of expectation burst out on the third morning:

"I am just quaking lest they won't come."

"I am just quaking for fear they will," bleated Mrs. Dundas.

"What does it matter?" asked Alice, briskly, not looking up from her task of patching linen sheets already patterned like an odd backgammon board in small and big squares. She did not allow the others to guess she was most desirous of all three. And she wanted not "them," but "him" to call. Whatever came of it besides, it would prove that for once she, Alice Bamfield, could attract a stranger at first sight, be more admired than the Marchmonts. Of course it would not *last*—Alice was not fool enough to think that. Nearly all the Marchmont girls' friends liked her—second best. She went to the Fordhurst Lodge parties just often enough to be known and liked—despite her shabby gowns and that

she owned no golf clubs, no bicycle, and no pony of her own, although as good as her companions in all outdoor sports. "No end better," said Dickie. But somehow (perhaps Lady Marchmont knew how or why), whenever any desirable bachelor at these parties showed a budding attraction towards Alice fate seemed to prevent their meeting again at the Lodge for a while.

"I wish—I do wish we might sometimes ask some of those young men to lunch that you meet at the Marchmonts. We have no means of showing any hospitality," sighed Cousin Charlotte.

"Her ladyship would never forgive it, if you did," returned Alice, drily. "She would not ask me to the house at all—that's all. And you and I cannot afford to drive to the spa and call on all the people there. Here it is the Lodge, or nothing."

So this third day, whilst stitching, Alice was thinking in her own mind: "The same old story. And I am so tired of being always only second-best." Nevertheless, she resisted Charlotte's urgings that afternoon to call unasked at Fordhurst Lodge or to stroll to the links on the chance of being asked to play. The links were on the Marchmonts' private property.

"It looks like rain," Alice resolutely objected, accustomed to use common sense on behalf of her caretaker as for herself. And, indeed, while Mrs. Dundas was still mildly lamenting the girl's obstinacy, down came a pattering shower towards three o'clock,

Two minutes later the old doorbell gave forth a startling, unusual peal.

"It's them!" announced Tip, in a whispered shout, putting her red head and scarlet cheeks in at the door of the muddle-room, where Alice was poring over the house-books and Mrs. Dundas was knitting, because even when silence was enforced she liked the sense of company.

"I was watching from the window and saw them turn in at the gate. Two strange gentlemen and the Seraph," spluttered Tip. (The Seraph was the handsome curate of Fordhurst, thus nicknamed by Alice.) "So I told Tozer to put on her clean apron, and I warned Uncle Peter."

"What did he say? Is he coming?" asked Alice, with cheeks pleasantly aglow and eyes lit up, despite apprehension.

"He bolted outside by his study door and called back 'Hang it all! Tell whoever it is, I'm out.' And he's standing there cussing quietly to himself in the rain. Well, he *is*, Cousin Charlotte! I only say what he's doing."

"Dear! dear! You ought not to use such words. And tell me, Tip, is my hair right? Am?—"

"You're all right," answered Tip, breathless, never even glancing at Mrs. Dundas, but rapidly eyeing Alice with lynx-like solicitude. Then, as the latter was leaving the room with smiling composure, the child turned, remembering the late reproof which she had no intention of accepting without argument,

"And it's not me that uses the bad words, it's him. But I don't believe he means any more harm by it than you do when you say 'Dear! dear!'"

Mrs. Dundas was too busy setting herself to rights before a spotted mirror, however, to pay any heed to Tip's opinion. Next minute, the gentle lady piloted herself carefully down the polished stairs and sailed like a wooden frigate into the drawing-room.

The Seraph was first to greet Alice, mouthing in a deep voice, which he fondly imagined was a musical baritone: "Allow me to present two new parishioners, a—Oh, I forgot, you have met before."

When Mrs. Dundas followed, he sprang up and began again: "Allow me to present two new parishioners, a great acquisition to Fordhurst."

Cousin Charlotte graciously allowed the ceremony, and fluttered down between the Seraph and the tutor. For Clarence De Lacy, after a charming bow to the duenna, captured the chair beside Alice with the air of a peach-colored Cæsar who knows what he wants to have.

"I say I've won my bet! You can't think what a lot of diplomacy it took," he imparted eagerly, in a cautiously lowered tone. "Mr. Eglinton, my tutor, you know, said it could not be done, that it was not correct. But I'm a tremendous fellow for getting my own way when once I've set my heart on anything. So I invented a plan and got our gentle pastor to take it up as his own pet lamb. So here I am,

and I only hope you're a hundredth part as pleased as me that we managed it."

Alice was pleased: what girl could help it? Clarence De Lacy was looking at her with blue eyes so boyishly joyous: his face, which boasted a pink and white complexion that most girls might envy, was lit up by a winning smile. Tall and straight, with a supple grace in his movements, and a touch of caressing blarney in his voice that hinted at a Celtic strain, he was a very picture of fair-haired youth and grace.

"But what is your plan? And what has Mr. Sheppard to say to it? My uncle is rather a hermit."

"Exactly what the Marchmonts said. But they let out he was great on music. *That* gave me my cue. Eggy is the same—my tutor Eglinton, I mean—he plays the flute like a lark, and as to the violin, he can make me weep when he pleases. It's a fact. You would not think it, perhaps, but I am a very soft-hearted chap."

"Of course I don't know you well, yet; but why should I not think it," returned Alice, maternally stirred by the speaker's guileless face and fairness, as she had not felt since she laid her last dearly-loved broken doll to rest in a grave in the Biarritz pine-woods.

"What a splendid idea, Mr. Sheppard," Cousin Charlotte was saying to the Seraph, who had just finished expounding the object of their visit. "You

are so devoted to the good of Fordhurst. Amabel, do run, my pet, and see if you can find your Uncle Peter. Tell him that Mr. Sheppard has come on purpose and wants to see him most particularly."

"Am I to go, Alice?" muttered Tip, audibly.

"Go—go, when Cousin Charlotte asks you," whispered Alice, pretending to look shocked while inwardly vexed. Mrs. Dundas was smiling, but in a hurt manner. Poor thistle-down mind. The least little breeze of elation was enough to float her off regardless of prudence, of all experience.

"If only she would not meddle with him, but let sleeping dogs lie," thought Alice.

In a few minutes Mr. Bamfield appeared, ostentatiously taking off his Sunday hat, as he entered. His boots were mired with dark garden mold, to his niece's dismay, for she rightly surmised he had stamped them in a flower border to prove that he had really been out of doors.

The Reverend Raphael Sheppard bounded up and repeated: "Allow me to present two new parishioners, a great acquisition to Fordhurst." Then growing nervous under Peter Bamfield's grandly ceremonious air and furtively searching eye, the curate stammered, beginning to feel uncomfortably intrusive now the reputed badger had been drawn: "We—we—I am particularly desirous of getting up a concert soon, of—er—really improving music, Mr. Bamfield, to raise the tone in our parish. So as these gentlemen are both musical and have kindly volun-

teered their services, we are come to solicit your kind co-operation, and to request your valuable advice——”

“Hum,” said Bamfield, thoughtfully. Then his eyes turning towards Alice, whose company he always sought by preference, he quietly inspected her companion.

“And what instrument is yours, may I ask, young gentleman?” he inquired, in a grandiose tone that struggled hard to hide surliness.

“Me. Oh, I’m not up to much, I’m afraid. I can sing a comic song, and I play the banjo,” answered Clarence De Lacy, with what Alice thought frank fearlessness.

“Oh!” said Peter Bamfield, no longer disguising his sullen scorn.

Alice felt aghast as she saw his mouth, that was always a wavering crack in his face, tighten ominously. His eyes regarded the curate with an angered gleam, whereupon the latter began apologetically, in a very high key: “But surely, I understood you to say that Mr. Eglinton——”

“Yes, yes; Eggy, speak up. You are no end of a performer!” interrupted De Lacy, in a tone of gay patronage.

The tutor, who till then had kept shyly in the background, thus adjured, opened his mouth. He was a big, loose limbed man, with a thick grey beard, which needed trimming, his eyes were hidden behind smoked glasses—of the straight-barred, stigmatic

kind—and what rest of his face remains to be described was sallow and lined. However, one good gift at least was his, that of a pleasing voice and well-trained accent, as he modestly admitted :

“I merely owned to being a humble worshipper of music. Though I generally only play in private for my own pleasure, still in so good a cause Fordhurst parish is most welcome to my small help.”

“And what do you play, sir?” asked Bamfield, downrightly better pleased.

“The violin ; but I fear you will find me sadly below the mark.” The tutor’s voice became still more deprecating. “For several years I was far from civilization in India-tea-planting. And music became my chief solace. That’s all.”

“Hey? My case, too. Coffee in Ceylon,” jerked out Peter with sudden interest, taking a chair beside the tutor. Next minute they were interchanging the shibboleth of those who have lived in the East.

“There! Like to like. Uncle Peter has actually taken to Mr. Eglinton. I never saw him look so pleased with any stranger before,” breathed Alice in great relief.

“Well done, old Eggy! He really is a trump at times, though he looks a frump,” imparted Clarence, in cheery confidence. “I say, I very nearly put my foot in it, eh? But now those two are settled comfortably, do let you and me have a little talk to ourselves. I see the gentle Sheppard glancing this way as if you were not attending to a sermon. We two

were at school together—Yes, he looks years older, but that is because he is such a dark chap.” (Clarence toyed with the faint golden down on his upper lip, slightly envious that the curate’s face, though clean-shaven, yet betrayed a dark bluish blush where a beard was in abeyance.) “I say,” in jealous tones, “he’s coming over here. No! Thank goodness, your aunt captured him just as he was escaping. Tell me, do you think him so handsome? Miss Marchmont raves over him. And is he a great friend of yours?”

“I should admire him more, perhaps, if others admired him less,” replied Alice, in apparent jest, but whole earnest. Had not the curate been her shadow for some weeks after he first came? But now—he remained friendly, yet was said to be half engaged to Phyllis Marchmont. Certainly her ladyship always assured him with a maternal air, whenever they met, that he was always welcome at any time, and as often as he pleased, at the Lodge. “Second-best again; always second fiddle,” remarked Alice to herself with a sigh and a laugh. So now Miss Bamfield added, criticisingly:

“He is too dark to please me. I never seem to read people’s thoughts when their eyes are black, or even dark brown.”

“Can you read mine? Do try—they ought to please you, unless you are very hard to please,” promptly murmured Clarence, with a killing glance, his blue eyes alight with mischief and something more.

"Silly goose!" So Alice scolded herself for feeling ridiculously pleased, and suspecting that her cheeks looked rosier than their wont.

Be it said in her excuse, the winter had been long and dull. Alice very rarely met young men, few indeed besides Raphael Sheppard and Dickie Marchmont, the latter of whom she looked upon as a kind of brother.

For the next half hour none of the party stirred, until at last Mr. Sheppard rose and took his leave rather huffily.

"I must be going, I have much to do," he announced, in a deep, bell-like voice, waiting apparently for his companions to follow. But Clarence sat tight, as he afterwards expressed it, and looked innocent as a pet lamb.

"Mr. Eglinton, may I have the pleasure of your company in order to discuss this matter of the concert," went on the Seraph, addressing the tutor in a high pitched tone, startling by its abrupt transition.

"No, no. He is not going yet," intervened Bamfield, in a tone of geniality that even Alice had seldom or never heard her uncle use before. He and the tutor had been deep in tea-planters' talk like a couple of old cronies. "Mr. Eglinton, you must come and see my study. There are a good many Singalese curios there I should like to show you. Good afternoon, Mr. Sheppard; and if you take my advice you'll leave me and this gentleman out of your programme. Banjo and coster songs will

please Fordhurst yokels much more than Beethoven."

As the door closed on the good-hearted, but discomfited curate, Alice thought rather maliciously, "Serve him right! He can't be first both with me and Phyllis." Mr. Eglinton, who had risen on his host's invitation, laid a big hand in awkwardly caressing fashion on Clarence's shoulder, who was looking like a vexed child under Peter's sarcasm.

"I am supposed to be bear leader to my pupil, but as a matter of fact I am the bear, and he very often plays the master. Don't think less of him because he is more muscular than musical, Mr. Bamfield. De Lacy is still at the stage of liking a simple ballad sung in a stormy voice when the lover is frenzied. Then it dies away, like the wind through a keyhole, as despair sets in. But we must all creep before we can walk."

"You tried your level best to teach me the difference between—let me see—melody and harmony, last night. And you fiddled away in illustration till my brain was muddled. If I don't pass for the army, I shall tell Lord Eaglemont it's all your fault," retorted De Lacy, with a rather defiant laugh.

"Heaven forbid," said the tutor, dropping his banter for a sobered air, whether in reality or pretence of alarm Alice could not quite decide in her own mind. But she liked the relations between the elder and younger men. It spoke well for the pupil, she thought, that he was so cheery towards his tutor, and that the latter seemed genuinely interested in the young fellow.

CHAPTER V.

It was late in the afternoon before the visitors left. Twice or thrice the tutor had been unfeignedly uneasy lest they were outstaying their welcome on this first call.

But each time Eglinton glowered through his smoked glasses Clarence was the central object of three pairs of admiring eyes. For, in secret ruefulness, as he contrived to make Alice understand and that she indeed reciprocated, but with a good humor that her reason equally approved, De Lacy on the curate's withdrawal had set himself the task of playing to all the ladies' gallery. Now Tip was convulsed with mirth over his mimicry of Mr. Sheppard's two voices.

"I can do the trick, but I want to write about him to my mother, and what floors me is the description. Can you help me, Miss Bamfield?"

"He reminds me of the baying of a bloodhound, at first; then one might fancy he was preaching at skylarks in the clouds," laughed Alice.

"Sheppard has really a splendid voice, if he only knew how to use it. It is a pity he has not taken

lessons in elocution," said the tutor, in a kindly tone, defending the absent.

"Well, I can't exactly call you a prig," thought Alice, slightly self-vexed, "still—still I wasn't saying any harm."

"Leave 'em alone. Mr. Eglinton, I want to show you something else," advised Peter, cynically. "No, no. You must not go yet. Why, you are the first person I have met for years who noticed that door there was hewn with an axe, and guessed its date. Yes, this house stood in the days of King John. Nobody cares here about its age excepting myself, and, I must say, my niece. Hey, little woman! Can you help me to find that illuminated Romaunt of the Rose? So you say those missals in my study would fetch a big sum?" This to the visitor, while Bamfield's features contracted and his eyes gazed absently in an odd mixture of avarice at thought of the riches in his power and reluctance to part with his treasured heirlooms.

Alice did her uncle's bidding with a cheerful nimbleness that both men admired, the guest in silence, the uncle vauntingly. "Oh, she knows—she could put her hand on any volume in the dark. She has plenty of light in the upper story."

Eglinton looked at the girl's clear grey eyes, well lit up from within, and mentally agreed. Then he quickly lowered his eyes, being absurdly shy with all women, despite his almost forty years. Clarence could have given him some lessons. So glancing

downwards the tutor's eyes fell on Alice's hands, that were dusty from the old volumes. They were very dainty hands, small but capable, with the prettiest tapering fingers and rosy nails imaginable. And there and then the rugged-looking, shy man was aware of a secret wish to salute that little hand with a most chivalrously humble kiss. What absurdity! So wild an idea had not flitted through his brain these four or five years past. He smiled grimly at himself, and Alice remarked: "The illuminations amuse you."

"A—lice! Come here. We want you!" called Tip, shrilly. And gladly the elder sister hastened back to the merry group, where Clarence De Lacy was cracking jokes.

Twice again Bamfield summoned his niece, without the least heed that he was plainly interrupting her enjoyment. And without the faintest trace of reluctance Alice dived into musty smelling chests at his bidding, disturbed cobwebs behind pictures to read labels, stood awaiting his further pleasure, sunny and sweet-tempered.

"After all, I believe she likes being with us two: she is a sensible, pleasant girl. Why do they call her away?" thought the tutor.

But always Tip's shrill tones recalled her elder, and Clarence welcomed back Alice with a radiant air, whereat her firm lips relaxed into a smile worthy a happy nymph in Diana's train. Only that Eglinton in the distance could not see,

The one jarring note in this happy time was struck by Mrs. Dundas who, giddy from the unaccustomed exhilaration of surrounding spirits, suggested in rallying tones:

"*Mister* Peter! It is almost five o'clock. Don't you think we might have some tea?"

Misguided woman. The unaccustomed levity met with sour rebuke.

"Ask Alice for whatever you want. She is mistress of this house," answered Bamfield, crustily. Then, pointedly ignoring the others, he eyed the tutor in hesitation: "Would *you* like any refreshment?"

"Thank you. My only refreshment between meals is music. Perhaps some other day we might—you would bring your 'cello to our room in the inn?"

"Certainly. But you must return the compliment. We can try over something some day soon, say, to-morrow—and Alice shall accompany us. Oh, she's not half bad," accepted Peter with quite a jovial air. "But what hour, eh——?" His face fell, dreading any hint of invasion near meal-times.

Luckily, his guests were too eager to secure their foothold in the fortress which they had entered by friendly stratagem, to risk losing the favorable opinion of its grim governor. So it was presently settled by Bamfield himself that after dinner should be the next meeting time. De Lacy regretfully intimated that he had then to do an hour's reading,

glancing reproachfully at Eglinton. The latter with a face of flint replied aside:

"Well; give up your golf in the afternoon earlier." Whereat Clarence shook his head with an air of gloomy impossibility.

While Bamfield escorted the guest to the door, the womankind interchanged delighted remarks on the new acquaintances. Tip, as usual, clamored to be heard first.

"Wasn't I cute, Alice, always helping you to get away from those two old codgers?"

"Sh, dear. Yes, it was nice of you; only don't use words you pick up from Tozer, or——"

"Well, I feel quite as if I had got a new lease of life!" exclaimed Mrs. Dundas, highly elated.

Alas! she spoke too loud. Bamfield entering, turned a frowning face upon the unforgiven offender.

"New life! Well, you may want to be more youthful, but you could hardly be more childish—which is not a compliment. It was you, I understand, who summoned me to see these visitors when I had sent word I was not at home. As it happened I like them—at least, one of them, but it might easily have turned out otherwise. Pray remember, Charlotte, you cannot be guest and try to play hostess. So if you are not too old to learn common sense kindly allow me in future to be master of my own actions in my own house."

On this Mrs. Dundas burst into tears, and began

whimpering apologies that she had meant it for the best; "and you did like them, so you need not be so unkind, now, Peter." Alice went and kissed her. Bamfield left the room, shrugging his shoulders. And Tip urged, consolingly:

"Come along to the kitchen. Tozer is sure to have the kettle boiling and all ready when she knows Uncle Peter is hanging around."

Mrs. Dundas dried her eyes under these comforting influences.

"Well; a cup of tea would certainly be rather refreshing."

So all three stole quietly to the kitchen, where, as Tip foretold, all was in readiness for the guilty meal.

Tozer, a tall old woman, now bent, but with remains of strength and energy, greeted them with a loud—

"Haw, haw, ladies; but you all look like birds when a hawk is about. No fear. Mr. Bamfield knows better than to come interfering in my kitchen. As I says to him, I says, 'sir, thirty-three years have I been in your family, since I was fust your nuss-maid and used to shake ye and spank ye! An' here I stays till I'm carried out, whether you sack me, or leave me till I die; wages is a matter of indifference,' says I, 'but I'm tired of changes. Miss Alice's parents racketed me round to eight different houses whilst I lived with them. Eight! An' I never cud remember which drawer in which kitchen I kept my rolling-pin in. 'So,' I says, 'leave me my kitchen, Mr. Peter, in peace, and peace I'll leave to

you. But I no more want men in here, begging your pardon, than my cat wants your dog."

Tozer was still talking half an hour later in spite of Tip's wild efforts to get in a word edgeways.

As the visitors walked back to the "Red Lion," where they had taken up their quarters, De Lacy exclaimed:

"I say. Isn't that a stunning girl?"

"Well; she certainly struck me as a very nice girl, good-tempered and agreeable."

"What an antiquated way of saying you were struck—all of a heap. Really, you must be more up-to-date, old chap. Let me enrich your vocabulary," laughed Clarence, good-humoredly.

"We will consider the question. Hallo, that's a clever-looking pony. You don't play polo, eh? No. Well, but there is no reason why you and I should not have some rides. Lord Eaglemont gives me scope enough to hire a couple of nags."

"Lord Eaglemont seems to give you much more of a free hand than he does me. He is down enough on any extras in my bills," grumbled Clarence.

"He has known me a long time, and I am certainly older and perhaps wiser than you," answered the tutor, smiling from under his thick eyebrows on the handsome lad. In his heart he was thinking—"Of us two I might be the envious one. Oh, youth, youth, with all its possibilities, its glittering dreams! . . . All past for me evermore, all before him. . . . I wonder if I do seem an old fogey to a girl like her."

CHAPTER VI.

Six weeks had passed since the visitors at the inn came to Fordhurst, and the spring was in its perfect prime, as of glorious youth and maidenhood in spring flower.

The ancient gables and tall chimneys of The Grove were almost hidden by the surrounding branches of great trees. Peter Bamfield would not allow a twig to be lopped unless one threatened to break a window pane. He loved trees and plants as he loved music: these were the two last unchoked channels through which his soul still drew some of that spirited nourishment by virtue whereof it was not yet wholly dead and withered.

As to the garden of The Grove, Alice used to steal out early those mornings and stand entranced by the beauty of the dew-drenched flowers, only simple, old English favorites filling the long borders, but in masses of bloom, with the spikes of lilac and a golden deluge of laburnum in the background.

"How sweet! Sweet! Sweet!" she used to breathe softly to herself. It seemed too much, al-

most sinful selfishness, to be enjoying so profuse a beauty alone. Hark! how freely and loudly the birds were still warbling at six in the morning! Yet far earlier Alice had drowsily roused, hearing through her open lattice before dawn a thousand feathered songsters close outside in bush and tree, piping, carolling, twittering, and pouring out full-throated nightingale love-songs. That was indeed a very "charm of birds," as country folk say. "It is like their early choral service, when they have the world new-washed, all to themselves," sleepily thought the fair-haired head on its pillow within doors.

Being young and loving of nature, Alice yearned for someone with whom to share all this, to enter into her raptures in speaking, silence, and to increase her delicious revelry of mind twofold. But Cousin Charlotte hated early rising. And Tip was still given to childish things, and cared more for picking green gooseberries for tarts than a lapful of pale pink dog-roses.

Then a small smile dimpled the corners of the girl's firm mouth, a hope not too distant deepened her grey eyes. "He will come this evening, at least. Poor fellow! how he hates dry reading these delicious mornings. Then there is polo in the afternoons—that is Mr. Eglinton's doing."

True enough, that afternoon saw the figures of both Clarence De Lacy and his tutor coming straight into the garden by the lane-gate. They had now

received the "freedom of the house," as Bamfield said in gruff pleasantry.

For he himself had asked them to stroll in from the inn garden across the lane when they pleased! Or rather this invitation he had tendered to his special friend, Eglinton, and Clarence easily widened it to include his supple self. Peter grunted the first time the youth came alone thus, but when Clarence (at Alice's wily suggestion) did an hour's work with her, thinning out carrots, the stern owner of The Grove relented. As to Eglinton, he long ago had entered heart and soul into helping Peter with the bees. Besides, he could graft, prune, sow, plant against Bamfield. He even offered to clip the yew hedges, but retired conscience-stricken, when the old gardener asked witheringly whether it was fair to take the bread out of a poor man's mouth, who only got two days in a week of a job from Bamfield *as things was*.

In spite of their now daily intimacy, yet Eglinton took the chair Alice offered him between herself and Mrs. Dundas with shyness. Clarence (seldom thus troubled) flung himself with easy grace on the grass upon the other side of Alice.

"Have you had a good game this afternoon?" asked Miss Bamfield, with the impartiality of a correct hostess. Apparently she was addressing the teapot.

Cousin Charlotte and Tip at once took up the chorus.

"Yes, Mr. De Lacr, did you distinguish yourself?"

"I say, did you both beat the Spa team?"

"Well, I was not in form," owned Clarence, with the candor that always endeared him to womankind. "There is the silent hero who showed us all how to play. Really, Eglinton rode quite surprisingly to-day."

And the bright-faced youth looked up at the taciturn elder, whom he kindly often thus tried to show off to advantage. "I say, Eggy, it is not fair for you to beat us all at golf besides. Where did you learn all your tricks, you cunning old dog?"

"Oh, knocking about," murmured Eglinton, deprecatingly, looking down at his beard that was pillowed on his breast.

(Alice longed to tidy its ragged edges then and there with Cousin Charlotte's embroidery scissors, that lay temptingly near.)

Rousing to slight eagerness, the sallow-faced tutor gently asked:

"Would you like to come and see us play next Saturday? We might get the inn wagonette and drive you over—eh—Clarence? And then we could invite the Marchmonts, too."

"Dear me! That would be very festive," exclaimed Mrs. Dundas, with sprightly readiness.

"*Goluptious!*" vociferated Tip, determined to honor them with her small presence.

Only Alice was hesitating. A glad acceptance

was just escaping her rosy lips when she felt a slight tug at her dress. Glancing down in surprise, she saw Clarence looking up with coaxing blue eyes, shaking his golden head in dissent.

"Isn't Saturday next the day for the Speldcombe cricket match?" he drawled, with seeming carelessness. I fancy—though I'm not quite sure—that the fellows there rather count upon me."

"But that is nothing special: a mere weekly game. And you know, De Lacy, that the polo men all come from a distance, so it would be a pity if our team were short of a player. Can't you get out of your village match?" asked Eglinton, vexed.

"We'll see: very likely. I daresay," came in tones of lazy good-humor from the prone youth, who was hidden from view of all but Alice.

Again, the latter felt her dress entreatingly twitched, and cautiously venturing a second glance, she saw Clarence pursing his cherubic mouth, wagging his sunny head in a still more resolute denial. He drew a folded slip of paper from an inner breast-pocket, held it up cautiously, imploringly.

Alice's lashes drooped over her clear eyes; but—one hand slid slowly to her lap, down by her side. Instantly she felt the note transferred to her fingers. Was it fancy? Or could that light touch on her hand, as of a butterfly's wings, have been a—kiss? The audacity of it! Not a yard away from the tutor, from Cousin Charlotte!

Stung by a sense of guiltiness, Alice turned

towards the tea-table with decision, grasping the teapot with her right hand. Her left was tightly closed over the naughty missive.

"I am rather afraid, Mr. Eglinton, that Saturday is—that I shall not be able to go that day," she said, slowly, with genuine regret. "But please don't mind *me*."

"Indeed! That is a pity. Well, we must put it off, that's all." Eglinton's face relapsed into its usual gentle impassiveness. His grey eyes, that had lit up with passing animation, resumed their usual sad expression, visible now, seeing he had abandoned his smoked glasses for an ordinary pair. Mrs. Dundas, after first acquaintance, had rallied the tutor to his discomfort about those same goggles, until Peter rather curtly told her to stop teasing.

"When a man has had fever like my friend Eglinton, he is bound to have attacks of it still. Could you not see him shivering with it the other day? If it makes his eyes weak, no wonder! He's had a hard life for years, the same as myself. He tells me all about it, and I feel for him. He is the one man I have taken a liking to for years, so don't you laugh at him, please; at least, in my house." Thus Bamfield had spoken with decision.

It was well for Alice now that she was wont to be her own mistress besides Tip's recognized guardian, for she had some ado to quell the latter's loud laments, demanding to know what Alice did want to do the next Saturday. Mrs. Dundas also kept on repeating in perturbed undertones:

"Can't you put off whatever it is, dear?
Dear, dear! What a disappointment!
Could I help, or go for you, whatever it is,
another day?"

At this Alice became suddenly aware that the pretty page at her feet buried his face suddenly in the turf while his shoulders shook with silent laughter. With dignity Alice suppressed her sister, and thanked Cousin Charlotte, whilst vouchsafing no information. Then, because her conscience smote her for selfishly pleasing Clarence rather than these three others, she tried to make it up to Eglinton by turning to him with marked cordiality for the next ten minutes. So well she succeeded that the poor tutor beamed with pleasure. He raised his big form that had lain listlessly in the depths of a crazy deck-chair, his loosely hung limbs seemed infused with new life, to be gripping a saddle and handling a spear in imagination, as he vividly described the delights of a boar-hunt.

Alice was really interested—but she alone. For Clarence, seeing her attention thus engaged, after lying sulky for fully sixty seconds, got up and came round to Mrs. Dundas. Resolved to play tit for tat, he amiably treated that simple soul to his most fascinating smiles and barefaced flattery of her embroidery, her croquet-playing at Fordhurst Lodge yesterday, herself in everything. Then, as she hung upon his words, he soon glided into a kindred topic equally engrossing, so that Cousin Charlotte presently cried out:

"Oh, Alice, listen! Mr. Eglinton, were you telling something? I beg your pardon, but Mr. De Lacy says his mother may come down here in July."

"Really. I shall like to hear about that presently. Won't you go on, Mr. Eglinton?" answered Alice, secretly yearning to hear about the blest matron, whom her boy often spoke of with adoring pride. But she was sensitively polite towards all educated persons, as governesses, tutors, and suchlike, of good birth, forced by poverty into dependent situations. Lady Marchmont's patronage of herself it was that taught her understanding sympathy.

"Never mind about the boar. I'll tell you his fate another time. Ask De Lacy about his mother, please, for I hope to goodness Mrs. O'Beirne won't come, and I want to know," replied Eglinton, in a tone of friendly confidence. He had been interrupted in the most thrilling part of his tale, but bore that as if well used to resignation.

"You hope she won't come. Why? I thought she must be charming from what he always says," returned Alice, surprised and whispering also.

"Exactly. So charming that if she comes he won't do a stroke of work, and Lord Eaglemont will be displeased."

"Do you know her, then? What is she like?" in curiosity to know the truth from a third party about the enviable mother of so delightful a son.

"I know of her. And I have seen her several times walking in the Row. One soon gets to know

the fashionable ladies in London by sight: and he," with a swift indication of Clarence, "is very like her. "

"Hullo! What are you two holding a secret confab about over there?" broke in Clarence, gaily, yet with an air of boyishly candid jealousy. Then hastening to secure the recaptured general attention, "I say, Eggy, if my mother comes she'll bowl you over completely, take you by storm, and twist you round her little finger till she makes you write whatever she likes to Eaglemont about me. Good old Eaglemont! All the same he might give me a good allowance and send me round the world on a pleasure trip like so many other fellows, instead of dinning it into my mother and me that I must pass for the army. I'm too active a chap for all this rotten reading."

"Yes, indeed. And when you are your cousin's heir it is a shame of him," agreed Mrs. Dundas, in simple pity.

"Well—not his heir exactly. Unless, of course, he pleases, seeing I am his only near cousin," corrected De Lacy, in a tone of strict justice. Then, impulsively, "Besides, he likes me because of the mater being his first and only love. Shall I tell you the story?"

Of course the womanfolk were instantly tingling with curiosity. Eglinton, too, lying back, prepared to listen.

CHAPTER VII.

"It's like this," began Clarence, smiling with radiant pity of the subject. "Eaglemont seems to have been very soft-hearted as a young chap, and always admired his cousin, my mother, who was older than himself. Well, she married very young. But my poor father died a few years later, in fact in my infancy. So she came back to Eaglemont Hall a lovely young widow of twenty-seven, as lively as anything, you may be certain. So the present Lord, who was then only a younger son, Bill Eltoun, mind you, well, he fell just head over ears in love with her. I remember it, for, if you please, I was made a kind of gooseberry. Can't I fancy my mother purring, "Oh, the boy is quite a chaperon," and she would look as innocent all the time as a kitten that wouldn't think of touching cream. Bill must have been only twenty-three, but I bet she looked five or six years younger than he did. (She's always taken for my elder sister.) Well, the long and the short of it was that they got engaged. I was a kid of five, and Billy used to carry me pick-a-back; I remember holding on by his hair, that was

very thick, and kicking like mad to make him prance."

Clarence paused a minute, as he leaned forward with his arms on his knees, midmost of the little group that listened with the genuine interest most people take in real live love-stories. He smiled tantalizingly with a to-be-continued-in-our-next air till there came a burst of feminine entreaty, ended by—"Get along! Why are you stopping?" This was masculine.

"Well! it was the old story," went on Clarence, in slow enjoyment. "He had merely a small allowance and she had hardly a penny, as my father was only a good-looking Irish officer, of good family. You all know what that means—mortgaged estates and so forth. So Eltoun resolved to grasp the horny hand of trade, and went off to foreign parts, tea-planting, where our friend Mr. Eglinton here got friends with him. Unfortunately, the poor fellow had no luck! He hoped to make his fortune, and they say he worked away like a nigger. But no end of disasters overtook himself and his crops. So when seven years were nearly sped, thinks my mother, 'Time won't wait. I'd better hurry up.' Thereupon she got hold of the Chieftain (that's what I call my stepfather, Colonel O'Beirne). He hasn't much to speak of beyond his pension and his medals, besides a ferocious moustache. But, after all, she thought it was no good waiting for Eltoun any longer."

"Of course not. No good at all. She was very sensible," assented Mrs. Dundas, with her usual bland amiability.

Tip for once had the grace to forbear offering an opinion. But Alice asked rather abruptly, squaring her chin in a way that left people doubtful whether it were sarcasm or disapprobation:

"What about Mr. Bill Eltoun?"

"Oh, poor old Billy. The queer thing is that he never heard a word about it for nearly a year. My mother swears she wrote. I don't know. Anyway, he only got the news just before his elder brother died, when he came in for the title and estates and the whole blessed show. It spoiled all his pleasure, for he was dreadfully cut up about her. And upon my word, it was very hard on my mother, too! However, my step-parent is drinking himself to death, so she may get her chance of being a peeress after all."

"Dear me. . . . Oh, well? One never knows," murmured Mrs. Dundas, slightly perplexed what to say.

"Do you think he'll ever forgive her?" This from Alice, downrightly.

Clarence wrinkled up his velvet-white forehead and opened his sunny eyes wide. Then, quickly deciding that his chosen damsel must be incapable of harboring a thought in disapproval of the beautiful being that had borne himself, he answered in cheerful soothing:

"Oh, if once she can only get him to meet her again—you'll see! After he came home he lived at Eaglemont Towers like a regular old hermit, nursing the property and going in for half rents returned to the tenants, and that kind of game. And then he went off travelling again, but he writes, half-promising to let me go and see him perhaps this summer. (He's always been very kind to me, I must say, about my schooling and so forth since my mother let him know the state of affairs.) But as to her—he does fight very shy. No matter! She's as smart as paint and the cleverest woman out. Once the Chieftain returns to the soil of old Erin she'll know what to do. And if she only gets *canoodling* round Eaglemont he's very changed from the good-hearted chap I used to romp with if he can hold out."

The speaker wrinkled up his straight, short nose so comically, with a face laughing like sunny April, that Tip, infected by his jollity, gave an eldritch squeal of mirth. Mrs. Dundas, too, giggled gently, for though as upright a soul as most breathing it secretly always tickled her whenever a woman got somehow the better of that stronger, overbearing creature—man. Only Alice had half turned and seemed fiddling with her old straw hat. Inside its shelter a note opened between her deft fingers.

"Please, please meet me on Saturday in the nut-wood after six o'clock. I shall come back that way,

from the Speldcombe cricket match. E. is safe to be at his polo. Do come! Don't disappoint your devoted
You know Who."

Very quickly Alice tucked the note inside the lining of her ancient and battered hat, then put the latter on her head. It was done so cleverly that even Clarence—who she felt was watching her whenever he could—did not understand the action, and called out in saucy remonstrance:

"Oh, Miss Bamfield, why put on that horrid head-gear? It hides your hair, which is a pity." Alice's seemingly burnished hair was indeed one of her chief adornments, as Clarence frankly hinted. Another thought so, too, for Eglinton looked up furtively from under his thick eyebrows with a secretly admiring glance, and perhaps envy of the daring stripling.

"Hats were made to be worn," returned Miss Bamfield, decidedly. "And none other will any of you see on me this summer, except my Sunday one; unless I get a fortune." Springing up, she excused herself a minute on the plea of having something to say to Tozer. As she went, with unusually slow steps towards the back of the house, Alice felt thrilled with a new, delicious trouble. A love-letter! Her very first. She was guiltily, gladly aware of its presence over her head, seeming to diffuse a sweet confusion in her brain.

Should she go? Should she not——? The first

step in a first love affair seems verily a plunge. If she did, would it not be encouragement, and was that wise—wise for him, as for herself? Ah! she must be wise and reasonable for his sake, too, dear, foolish boy——

At that minute came an outburst of chirping chatter as of human sparrows. The Marchmont girls, followed by the Seraph, were being formally shown by Tozer from the house into the garden.

“Oh, Alice, how’d ye do, darling?” cooed Phyllis and Ione in precisely similar tones. They were very tall, very slender, and had a way of drooping their fluffy heads like flowers too heavy for their long stalks.

“Why haven’t you been to see us, lately? As you didn’t, we’ve come to see you, and brought Mr. Sheppard along with us, too. . . . Oh, and *there* are Mr. De Lacy and Mr. Eglinton. Why, you have quite a party. Naughty girl, not to invite us.”

And hardly taking the trouble to shake hands with Mrs. Dundas, not deigning to notice Tip as yet, who glowered with injured feelings, both girls rustled towards Clarence, their chief attraction, showering smiles and chat upon him as if out of a waterin-pot, the fringe of which refreshing gush fell upon Eglinton also.

Alice ground her foot viciously into the grass, inwardly flaring up.

“Humph! They’ve got the Seraph in attendance, now they want a second squire. Am I never to be left anyone to like me best?”

"Can't you both come back with us and have a turn at golf," the Marchmonts urged both men. "So sorry we can't stay, Alice. But we only looked in for a moment."

"Oh, do——!" chimed in the Seraph, as in duty bound.

"That settles it," said Alice to herself, setting her face to sternness.

"I don't know—really. Thanks, awfully," hesitated De Lacy, flattered. His watchful guardian helped him to a decision.

"Remember, old chap, you've not done your day's spell of reading. Many thanks on my own account, young ladies, but I'm dead beat after polo, and was just about leaving, now that we have enjoyed (Eglington glanced slyly at Mrs. Dundas) a most refreshing cup of tea——"

"Well, we'll go as far as your inn door with you, Mr. De Lacy, at all events," returned the Marchmonts, discomfited but not defeated.

As they walked off with their not all unwilling captive, his eyes turned on Alice with a longing look; he murmured a meaning "Good-bye."

"*All right.* Are you going? *Yes.* Good-bye," ejaculated Alice in brief tones that hardly anyone could have supposed conveyed a maid's consent to a love-tryst. But Clarence went off with a more than usually jocund air.

Eglington seemed quite buoyant as he, too, strolled

away; though that was only towards the kitchen-garden plot, where a squashed felt hat, presumably crowning a scarecrow, was wobbling behind the currant bushes.

"Good-evening, Bamfield. Let me take a turn at digging. Fair play, turn and turn about, you know."

"Eh, what? Is that you? Well, I don't mind if I rest a bit." And Peter Bamfield raised a face more yellow and hollow-cheeked than even his usual appearance.

"Look here! You have been working too hard. You are tired out," exclaimed the guest with concern. "Why don't you get in the gardener? You'll kill yourself, if you go on at this rate!"

"No, no; or if I do there will be only one mouth the less to feed," said Peter, peevishly, handing over his spade with weary hands. "My dear man, I can't afford the gardener any more. And do you know, can you guess, what money I save by rearing these potatoes and lettuces myself—not to speak of the peas, beans, and fruit?"

"Can't say; but it's dear at the price of your health."

"Why, who'll care if I turn up my toes? Nobody."

"You're wrong. Somebody will care a good deal, and that is your pretty niece. And I should feel sorry myself."

"Hum! Ha. . . . I wish you were a bit better

off, Eglinton," remarked Peter, apparently irrelevantly, filling his pipe. "D'ye know why? I think you and she would suit well together."

Eglinton's calf-bound visage turned to russet hue, and he dug furiously two spadefuls before answering, with intense self-scorn:

"*Get* out! What do you suppose a bright young creature like that could see in a battered hulk like me? She would laugh at the very idea. It—it would be ridiculous—for her."

"I don't know that. I say you two would suit, and I'd like it," mused Peter Bamfield, sticking obstinately to his point. Then he smoked.

After some time of mutual silence, Eglinton remarked:

"Come round to dinner to-night? Do. Only pot-luck, you know—and music."

"Eh, what? But I dined with you, let me see—the other day. It's your turn—yes, yes, your turn," hesitated Bamfield, though with glistening eyes.

Both knew perfectly that he never would ask anyone to dinner. Likewise, that he now dined twice a week at the inn as a matter of course. But as usual Eglinton answered gravely:

"You see it is difficult with De Lacy. He must read, and it's not fair to leave him to feed alone. Besides, there are some cricket acquaintances of his who drop in to the inn that I don't much care about."

"I see. I see. Well, if you'll allow me to come as I am—my old evening suit has to last me out my

time, so I spare it." It was at least the sixteenth time Bamfield had accepted a similar invitation in the same words; whereupon Eglinton begged him as invariably to come just as he pleased.

Then Bamfield, bethinking himself he must tell Alice "not to put his name in the pot for dinner," hastened with his dragging gait houseward. Passing the tea-table, and Mrs. Dundas, who looked up nervously, he made no remark, finding it convenient to wink at minor extravagances that allured guests so useful.

"It's a pity he did not ask me sooner. Then you three could have done with tea," he grumbled to his niece. "Yes, I saw you had all been guzzling out there. Well, well, throw a sprat to catch a whale! Hee, hee!" And he rubbed his lean hands with their fleshless fingers and curved nails.

Alice answered dutifully, though she felt revolted at his meanness. Afterwards she made excuses in her own mind. "Poor uncle! He has had such a hard struggle of it all his life; now he is so needy still and growing old. But I shan't tell the others. They would not understand."

"Going to dine *again* with his one particular chum. Poor Mr. Eglinton! Alice, you have much to answer for," smiled Mrs. Dundas, in a rallying manner, raising her delicate eyebrows, pencilled slightly by art, till they met her white baby curls.

"What do you mean?" demanded Alice, giving an honest stare.

"You little flirt!" archly. "Do you mean to say you were not trying to turn that unfortunate man's head this afternoon; listening to his prosy shikar stories and smiling on him so bewitchingly?"

"I mean to say I was trying nothing of the sort. And it is not in my line to be bewitching (witheringly). I am always honest, and I like the sheep-dog. He is a kind old soul, and I am positive has no such ridiculous ideas as you pretend."

"Well, I'm not sure that I do like him. He is rather underhand, sometimes, in things he says—contradicting himself. And he can be sly and sarcastic," returned Mrs. Dundas, pettishly. "Give me the other. Clarence De Lacy is so open-faced. Besides, he is such a light-hearted, generous boy; and so fond of children. Tip adores him."

"Yes. He bought Tip's affection with a paper bag full of bull's eyes—and helped her to eat them," jested Alice. Then she turned away suddenly, and betook herself to her bedroom—a sanctuary with green wreathed old casement set wide open. She felt half ashamed of having praised Clarence so faintly; it seemed dishonest, almost disloyal. But had she said even a tenth of what she thought, Cousin Charlotte might have guessed her secret.

Alice's eyes fell on a text, rather ill-painted and cheaply framed, over her wash-stand. It was a labor she had accomplished at twelve years of age with much pride and sucking of her brushes. She still regarded both words and work with special

affection. It was the 15th Psalm, beginning. "Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle: or who shall rest upon thy holy hill?" Her eyes passed down to the fifth verse, answering:

"He that sweareth unto his neighbor, and disappointeth him not: though it were to his own hindrance."

"I wish that were not true about his mother. It is so like him to be candid," she said under her breath. Then carefully taking out her love-note she slowly re-read—and kissed it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE nut-wood was a green home of peace that Saturday afternoon. A field path from Fordhurst to Speldcombe hamlet joyously dived into its welcome shade, after passing over broad meadows ripening against hay-harvest in an open sweep of sunshine.

Midmost of the wood was a stile. And on its topmost step sat Alice Bamfield, drumming her heels now and again impatiently. Almost the temptation to bring a book so as to give herself countenance had prevailed. Then she contemptuously rejected the idea. "It's not honest. I'm going out to meet Clarence De Lacy and not to read in a wood. He knows it and I know it, so what's the good of pretence." One concession this stern-minded damsel made to feminine weakness, by turning her back towards Speldcombe. "It will only make him vain if he sees me watching," she told herself. All the same she threw at least three times a hasty glance over her shoulder. But no form showed between the light-leaved bushes nor on the path flecked with light and shade. So Alice waited.

The nut-wood hung on the side of a hill that sloped steeply to a dell, guessed at rather than seen between intervening foliage. A nightingale was singing down below. Nearer was the hum of insect-life. Across the fields a cock crowed. It was a delicious afternoon, warm with the first freshness of a coy English June, subtly fragrant with scents of humble herb and weed-flower, young leaves, and all things new with the spring. Alice enjoyed all these as she sat, while pleasant small thoughts danced in her mind like gnats in the sun. "What will it be like? Now I shall know how other girls felt, Kathleen Marchmont and the rest. . . . The annoying air of superiority with which Kathleen said to me, 'Poor Alice! Have you never had a love affair yet?' I wonder what he'll say. If he feels like me he won't know what on earth to say. . . . Well, it's very nice here, but rather demeaning to wait ages for anyone. . . . In two, no, five more minutes I'll go." And Alice gave one more look round.

He was there! Not two yards off, stealing softly forwards on tiptoe, with dancing eyes and hands stretched out as if poising the body on the balance. One bound, and he reached the stile, his arms were flung round Alice's waist, but lightly, as if longing not yet daring to close in embrace.

"Caught!" laughed Clarence, exulting in tender glee. "You were trying to pretend you would not even look my way, but you did—darling! How

sweet of you to come. I have been so afraid that you would change your mind." His large blue eyes sparkled with glee, turned wistful under the black cloud of such a thought. The rosy lips so near Alice's face quivered pathetically.

"Not come. But I said I would," returned Alice, proudly. "I never break my word."

"I know, I know. But still——"

There followed some moments of silence. The young man and the girl were looking each other in the eyes; near, insensibly nearer. Alice was aware of being uncomfortably shy, and awkward; also wondering what would happen next. Clarence was gazing at her in a delicious rapture as if he could look thus all a summer's day. Then his hand softly stole down Alice's arm, found her hand with sudden ecstasy.

"This sweet little hand! Do you know, Alice, that you have the duckiest hand in the wide world! I kissed these small fingers yesterday—do you know that, Alice?" babbled her lover, pressing his lips devoutly on a leather gauntlet.

"Oh, don't! These are my old gardening gloves," uttered Alice, dismayed.

"What matter? I would kiss the hem of your gown if it had trailed in the mud," exclaimed Clarence in ecstasy. "But there!" tearing off the unlovely object and stuffing it in the breast of his white flannel jacket, "Let me keep it—next my heart—always."

"No. Oh, no; please. It's all stained. I always wear these for weeding."

"Nothing will be given back except in exchange," victoriously. "Promise me another; a glove I must have."

"But I can't, really. I haven't got another pair in the world but my best; and how can one pay visits with one hand bare." Alice's voice was so rueful between refusal of love's request, or sacrifice, that, tickled by a sense of humor, both lovers burst out laughing. Thereupon Clarence took heart of grace.

"I must! Oh, I must!" His arms closed round Alice as she sat sideways on her stile, his mouth met hers so suddenly she felt as if receiving a blow, however light, rather than a kiss. In maidenly instinct she started backwards; a disappointed thought flashed across her troubled mind, "Is that the betrothal kiss that poets rave about?" She might have slipped off her perch but for Clarence's embrace that tightened, and his arms were strong.

"Alice, what is the matter? My love—dearest—don't you care for me, a little; just a little? You do: you must! Oh, you are so proud that otherwise you would never have come here to meet me," he implored in genuine lover's distress. "No; don't play fast and loose with me. You are not a girl like one of the Marchmonts, who come halfway to meet any fellow, not waiting to be asked. There . . . that's better . . . let me see your dear face smile on me again. Alice, you are so lovely!

Has anyone ever told you before you are lovely? But you don't seem to care one little bit about me. Tell me—is there anyone else you love?”

“No one,” said Alice, positively. (In her heart she added another answer: “And nobody ever called me lovely before. But it won't do to tell you that. And evidently I am not playing the game.”) So she asked, smiling enigmatically: “Why should you think there might be?”

“*Why*——?” Off went Clarence at score, lover's talk running over from his eager lips. And Alice, now more used to the situation, could not but look at him in wondering admiration. Seen so close his every hair was like golden thread, and could any girl's face be more exquisitely fresh, more rosy-red or milky white? Her heart leaped, realizing that this was a lover to be proud of—her own. Why, he was beautiful as Adonis. And her face lit up transfigured and softened.

Clarence saw, and a flush rushed hot to his cheeks, lovelight burned in his eyes.

“Ah! Another kiss——!” he breathed. “Give me one your own self.”

Alice found herself doing so, hesitatingly, but in her very coyness lay a charm for both.

Clarence replied in like manner softly now, as if one rose was stirred by a breeze to touch its fellow. Then vaulting over the stile he cried hotly:

“There! Now there is no bar between us two and never shall be any more. You love me? Say

you love me with your own lips that look, so Eg—so somebody said the other day, as if they had never told a lie.”

“Well, then, what can I say?” laughed Alice, bending back in his arms to look him frankly in the face. “For as I really don’t know exactly what it is to be in love, how can I tell?”

“Not know!” echoed Clarence in loving reproach, yet gloomily. “Why? Would you come here to meet anyone you did not love? Would you let any fellow kiss you? *That’s not like you.*”

“Of course not. Thank you! thank you! You have made it all clear to me,” exclaimed Alice, relieved and delighted.

Then Clarence put his arm round her, and together they sauntered down the path, whispering to each other in broken sentences, then presently sat down on the bank side by side.

“I say, pet, it is a shame to hide your little feet in such horrid boots, with balconies,” chid Clarence, playfully. “And your feet are such sweet ones, too! One day when you ran across The Grove lawn in your house-shoes, and held up your dress because of the dew, I saw them. And Eggy said some rot about that they stole in and out like little mice.”

“Are they not clodhopping things?” agreed Alice, ruefully, not hiding, but coolly sticking out the offending objects as if to take an impartial view of their hideousness. “You see these are cheap, besides so heavy they’ll wear me out before I wear

out them. I have only a very small sum to dress on, for Uncle Peter is too poor to allow me more, and Cousin Charlotte and I pay so much towards our keep. Uncle is always saying he has nothing to leave me except the old furniture."

"Are you his heiress, then? The Grove ought to sell well; it is wonderfully picturesque."

The suggestion was simply made, Alice felt rather ashamed of shuddering with horror at the idea.

"Who is to know that it is not mortgaged up to the door-scraper?" she answered, brusquely. "Why! None of the village tradespeople are ever paid unless they threaten to stop supplies. They are always grumbling."

"Poor darling! Well, no one can say I want you for your fortune, can they? How on earth are we to get married unless Eaglemont forks out and gives me a good allowance? He might, though," thoughtfully. "As it is, in every letter he harps on that I must be more steady. And there is nothing like marriage to make fellows settle down," Clarence ended with a joyous laugh.

Alice started slightly. So he was taking it for granted. Somehow, she had fancied that a proposal was more—more serious. In the back of her mind she rather wished Clarence had asked her to be his wife in so many words. It would have been thrilling to listen how he would say it; delicious to murmur her own vows. Somehow, she felt cheated

of the best bit in the play. But after all—he was manly and right in taking for granted she did mean to marry him. Ought she to have come, as he said, to have kissed him if she did not love him? And if she did love him, it followed——

“Why so thoughtful? Is my little Martha thinking already over our future housekeeping? See here! Let us fling worries about pounds, shillings and pence aside. Love in a cottage is good enough for me, bread and cheese and kisses,” cried Clarence in a new burst of ardor. And Alice surrendered her mind to the charm of her lover’s raptures. Nevertheless, after a while, she bethought herself it was time to get home, or her absence would be remarked. In a practical voice, she observed :

“What a pity it is you did not get into the army last year, along with Dickie. Then all would be so much easier.”

“Was it Eglinton who told you about that, or Marchmont? What did they say?” asked Clarence, firing up, the warm blood showing red in his pure complexion, which increased his look of ingenuous boyishness.

“My dear boy, you told us yourself. Don’t you remember Cousin Charlotte saying how well a uniform would suit you. Then you said how unlucky you were when going up for the exam. to be taken so ill the very day before, that you never even tried. And how your crammer declared that otherwise you would have passed first.”

"Ah! Yes. That's the worst of me. I prattle away, forgetting afterwards——" sighed Clarence, yet with a smile. "Don't repeat that, darling, though, to Eglinton; for he rounded on me the other day about my too great frankness. He said though he knew I was not boasting, other people might not. Anyway, he knows jolly well Eaglemont was pretty sure I could have passed last time and can pass easily next time, or his lordship would have sent me back to my crammer's instead of telling me to read by myself with a retired tea-planter as duenna."

"Yes. Why did he choose Mr. Eglinton? That has puzzled us all. He is a dear old thing, certainly, but he can't be up to the mark as a tutor."

"Better than you would think. He's very well read, but the idea was that I had crammed enough; so that Eggy was to be merely a guide, philosopher, and friend, all of which duties he fulfils very decently. Besides, it kills two birds with one stone. I fancy he has long been a hanger-on of Eaglemont's, so now he works for his keep. See. But, ha, ha!—young lady—I've caught you! So you think him a dear old thing? Do you know the other day I was mad jealous? I was, 'pon my honor. Why you talked away at old Eggy, and smiled in his face with my note clasped in your very hand."

"Oh, you silly, silly boy. Don't frown so tragically! The very notion of being jealous of *him* is too funny," and Alice went off into a derisive gurgle of mirth.

But she found to her surprise that Clarence was in earnest, so set herself to assure him that she was likewise. His fears laid to rest, De Lacy justified them, and enhanced his sense of conquest by gravely praising the supposed rival.

"He, is not so old as you think, and other men think a lot of him. All those polo fellows say he is a first-rate chap, though they know nothing about him. Besides, mind you, Eaglemont himself wrote to me that it was at his special desire, as his closest friend, that Eglinton undertook to look after me."

"One thing I do like; and that is you are so generous and loyal towards him," said Alice, warmly. "And I believe he really takes a great interest in you—he always speaks of you in quite an affectionate way behind your back."

"That's all right. Between you and me, it is jolly well worth my while to be friends with Eaglemont's friend," confided Clarence, sagely nodding, then gaily: "So now we will all go bounding along in the very best of worlds."

CHAPTER IX.

THE lovers twain had come out of the nut-wood, crossed a deep green dell by a footbridge over a brook, where they lingered unseen by any eyes, then breasting a grassy slope they got over another stile, with dalliance and laughter, into a leafy lane, just at the wrong moment.

Eglinton was riding quietly between the high hedges homewards, his dreamy gaze bent on the honeysuckle sprays.

All three started, but Clarence recovered his presence of mind first.

"Hallo, old man! Are you not sorry now you would go to your polo? Here have I just had the good luck to come on Miss Bamfield, who has been doing good deeds of charity, as usual. It is a pity you are riding, or your might come along the field path with us."

Eglinton reined up and his grave glance turned courteously on Alice, who somehow felt it like a searchlight. She took refuge in a brusqueness which indeed sat so pleasantly upon her that only carping persons decried it.

"Yes. It's a pity, as your pupil says. You can't

expect us to go jogging all the way round by the lane to keep you company."

"Certainly not," answered Eglinton, with instant cheerfulness. "But if I may come with you two, what's to hinder me."

Next moment he put his horse at a gap in the hedge and hopped over into the meadow. "Beastly nuisance," muttered Clarence. Alice could hardly help laughing, although vexed. And she could not but admire the way the lanky, big man sat his pony, like a centaur. Certainly in the saddle he was actually graceful.

When Alice regained her own room at The Grove she went straight to the mirror and looked searchingly at herself. No thought of vanity prompted the instinctive action. She was thinking with a kind of surprise, "*Well, now, I really must be in love!*" She felt as if a never-to-be-forgotten event had silently taken place in her life, and, though not a solemn personage by any means, was rather sorry Clarence had lured her into laughing so lightly about their love-tryst.

And she wondered, as often before, at the Marchmont girls who flirted as heedlessly with this man or that, as a clematis spray blown to one side or another by the wind. And Alice had heard them say in confidence: "What does a kiss matter." She now thought it mattered—for life. But then she was of tough fibre. Besides, to do justice all round, the Marchmonts had been brought up among boys,

both their brother's friends and cousins, whence followed secret engagements and dis-engagements in their teens. But the lonely child-housekeeper at Biarritz and The Grove was only familiar with the ways of an invalid stepfather and a crabbed uncle. So manhood in its youth seemed to her godlike, heroic.

Gently the June glided in. It had a showery opening, but then, said Eglinton, it was the very coolness and fresh green of England engendered by summer showers that those who knew a fiercer sun yearned after. The others jeered, but Alice sweetly agreed with the disappointed tea-planter. She was so happy, it was a pleasure to make everyone else a little happy.

Every evening, if not more often, the lovers met, and Alice's whole nature blossomed out into beauty and graciousness under the spell that stirred her as all nature with the springtime. It was so delightful to be placed on a pedestal and be worshipped with fragrant incense of devotion and flattery. A woman's natural craving to be needed by another being was satisfied. At times she frankly confided to Clarence, "It is so nice when you tell me I do things very well. Uncle Peter has always praised me but in a grudging way, he says I do 'well enough.'"

"What an old curmudgeon—begging your pardon, dearest," Clarence would answer, laughing. "You do everything better than any other girl ever

I saw in all my life: and so I knew from the first moment I met you."

"Ah! Are you quite certain? Somehow, I thought Phyllis Marchmont——"

"You dear little duffer," Clarence would cry scornfully, embracing her in proof of his words. "Why Phyllis! A girl who runs, positively runs, all over the links after Raphael Sheppard is not one I should ever have thought of making Mrs. De Lacy." This in a grandiose voice, adding more truthfully, but perhaps meanly: "As to Ione, if I had liked—But there! You could never be in the least jealous of them."

Alice felt less convinced of that than himself, and perhaps her feminine intuition was not far wrong that Phyllis just because of her Seraph had been a passing attraction. But she was sensible enough not to quarrel with past possibilities. She believed, and rightly, that Clarence loved her genuinely, with all the depth and ardor of which he was capable. So she rejoiced.

They met mostly in the evenings, just after dinner. For Bamfield and Eglinton had grown so intimate that they now spent that time in smoking together, the tutor generally strolling over without formality, unless Peter dined with him. Then Alice, slipping away from Mrs. Dundas and Tip for half an hour, who at first lamented but grew accustomed to her apparent unsociability, used to watch her chance with beating heart. Unobserved, she

would steal through the garden, by various ways, but always to the same goal, a crazy potting-shed, in a far corner near the lane, where Clarence would be waiting. She could smell his cigarette from the bean-rows. It was a safe spot; for any figure approaching down the walk could be easily seen from the window in the summer twilight, whilst a hasty exit by a door at one side, masked by the yew tree, and a leap into the lane over the hedge was easy when a man is three-and-twenty.

Sometimes Alice felt a sting of compunction when Clarence would whisper, with a stifled laugh:

"Fancy! Eggy thinks me reading at this moment, poor old boy!" Then she would be reassured as her lover added, loftily: "Oh, I have only to get up half an hour earlier to-morrow to make up for time not lost, well spent."

But always as nine struck by the church clock in the square tower, showing dimly through the trees, Alice tore herself away from the arms that would have detained her. Clarence might beseech, urge, in vain. Away she flitted by another path, and, only pausing to regain her breath, would enter the drawing-room with slow steps and composed air just as Peter with his guest came in from the study, saying: "Well, little woman, what about some music, eh?"

"How punctual you are. You really enjoy our home concerts, don't you?" Eglinton said to her with a visage full of such quiet satisfaction, as it

certainly had not worn on his first arrival in Ford-hurst.

"I like the evenings, but I also like pleasing Uncle Peter," replied Alice, with almost a note of defiance in her truthfulness. At which Eglinton's deep-set eyes smiled, and there was a faint motion of his bleached brown beard, that was slightly salted with grey, like his hair.

Seated near Alice, now and again, if she moved, the hem of her dress might brush his boots. Then he felt the touch all through his body. But how should she know that? At other times their hands held the same sheet of music, her sleeve frill once lay a moment on his fingers, coarsened by hard work, and the silent man fairly quivered.

"Oh, fool!" he said in his heart, "Oh, fool!" But in so many lonely evenings in Indian hills he had dreamed a dream—and it had been somewhat like this. Eglinton was romantically minded for a man. Alice piqued herself on being matter of fact. But afterwards, when both silently recalled that early June, the green days were all thick-set with pink blossoms of dog-roses, an evanescent glory blushing in the field corners and hedgerow nooks. And the twilight evenings were harmonious with deep-thoughted music.

There came a morning when Clarence De Lacy announced gaily he was going up to town. Only for two nights and a day, to be with his pretty mother and take her to the play. "She was leaving

her bibulous Chieftain to the repose of his club, which she called the Boozers' Rest, and was running up from Cheltenham just to enjoy a brief glimpse of the season with her son."

After De Lacy left, Alice found the hours leaden. She consoled herself by imagining Clarence and a charming woman driving in hansoms together, sitting side by side in stalls, laughing together, happy at being reunited.

On the morning when the absent one was expected back, however, Eglinton appeared earlier than usual in The Grove garden, and finding Mrs. Dundas and Alice gathering strawberries for jam stooped at once to work as a matter of course.

"Clarence is not coming back to-day," he began in a perplexed voice. "He has wired me, 'Mother unwell, can't return for a day or two.' I cannot make it out."

"Oh," said Alice, shortly, and she felt as if the sun was darkened by an eclipse.

"O—h!" lamented Cousin Charlotte, ceasing her fatiguing labors and easing her back. "Poor boy, how anxious he must be. Still, what is there puzzling about it?"

"Well, there is a letter just come for him," went on Eglinton, slowly. "It is in his mother's handwriting, but the postmark is Cheltenham. The O'Beirnes live there, I believe."

"Surely you are not suspecting that dear, open-hearted fellow!" uttered Mrs. Dundas in mild re-

sentment, arching her eyebrows. "Well, you must misjudge him."

"My dear lady, do not misjudge me. I am simply telling you both as friends all round," returned Eglinton, raising himself upright in turn and looking his accuser straight in the face. "As you both are as much in De Lacy's confidence as myself, I am asking can you throw light upon it. Is Mrs. O'Beirne ill in London or at home? And if at home, did she never join Clarence in London?"

After a general pause, Alice attempted a halting explanation. "If you are positive that the letter is from Mrs. O'Beirne——?"

"Quite positive. Her writing is unmistakable, and I have often seen it. Clarence has shown me some of her letters."

"Then I should say she was probably unwell, so did not start, but wrote to him to wait for her until yesterday. Next, supposing he felt obliged to return to-day, she addressed her letter here. But he—being anxious—is waiting in town to hear if he shall not go down home should she grow worse." Alice felt quite proud of her ingenious defence.

Eglinton listened, his face brightened with glad relief.

"What quick wits women have! I said to myself, Miss Bamfield is most likely of anyone to help me: you see I was right."

Alice grew red, but then she was in a plantigrade attitude which is notoriously apoplectic.

"Yes: that's it. But in that case I'll run up to town by the next train and bring his mother's letter which will either set Clarence's mind at ease, or call him home. However, there is time to finish this job," consulting his watch and looking kindly at the elder lady, who was still resting and flushed. "Why should you tire yourself, Mrs. Dundas? What is the good of a man like me unless to spare you unnecessary trouble? I'll do your share—and Miss Bamfield's, too, if she likes."

"Don't you mind, really?" Cousin Charlotte's blue eyes sparkled in gentle mischief, surveying the tutor and Alice's rounded person. "Well—when one has such a long waist as mine, one's back does ache more easily perhaps than those of shorter persons," and she complacently put her hands to her still trim waist. "Alice, do *you* mind my leaving you?"

"It would be a real blessing if you would go indoors and shell the peas," said Alice, gruffly. "As Mr. De Lacy told you the other day, an elegant woman like you ought not to do common or garden work."

Cousin Charlotte having moved gracefully off, Eglinton said in a confidential tone, newly come to him when with Alice:

"She has been very pretty in her time. But I should never have ventured to tell her so."

"There is your mistake. Charlotte adores Mr. De Lacy, and of course she thinks you don't admire

her at all. How is a woman to know unless she is told?" came in ever retreating accents as Alice grazed further among the strawberries.

("That's a hint. It would be a blessing if he would sometimes show Charlotte attention," was in the speaker's mind.)

"Is that a hint? *How is a woman to know unless she is told?* What a—an unspeakable, unthinkable blessing if she means it, ever so little," mused the man. He raised his eyes now and again with the longing look of an obedient spaniel, but dared not diverge from the strawberry lines pointed out by Alice's small index finger. And she strayed in wasteful heedlessness further: a law unto herself.

CHAPTER X.

CLARENCE returned with Mr. Eglinton next morning.

So the village gossip ran, for the milkman told Tozer he had heard so, who told Tip, who told Cousin, who told Alice. And all day the latter waited with eyes watching the garden sidewalk, ears alert. But the gate did not clink: no lithe form as of a Mercury in flannels came as usual under the spreading cedar branches.

That evening Alice's heart misgave her, she knew not why. But in the musty-smelling tool-house, under the cobwebbed rafters, she learned what her mind had divined of ill tidings in the air.

"Darling! It's all up with me. The game is over. Oh, Alice, it is too hard to bear! All my prospects are blighted for life. I can't stand it . . . but you won't give me up, dearest, will you? If you do, it will be the last straw, and I'll go to the bad completely. . . Say you won't!" So Clarence was sobbing, actually sobbing, his head laid on Alice's shoulder, as she sat on the plotting bench,

It was unusually dark that evening, but Alice fancied he was crying all alone when she found him waiting for her. Knowing her lover's excitable Celtic temperament she was not greatly surprised, and was intensely pitiful.

"Of course I won't. Am I not promised to you. . . . Oh, my poor own boy! There—my Clarence! Tell me. What is wrong?"

"Everything. It's that confounded visit to London. I fell among thieves, my child—among thieves, Alice. What did Eglinton tell you? Oh, he told me himself, by th-the-way."

Alice hastily sketched what had passed. And Clarence, holding back his sobs, listened.

"It was like you to guess that—my ownest. Of course you would stand up for me!"

"But what did happen? Was I right—did your mother not come because she was ill?" insisted Alice, anxiously, for Clarence's voice seemed reluctant to say more. Her arms supported him, her brave breast pillowed his golden head that had weakly slipped downward.

A few moments passed thus, then slowly Clarence roused from what seemed despairing apathy.

"You were right you always are you're a trump, dearest. No; my mother could not come up. Then I—I got into bad hands, Alice—old pals of mine, but a bad lot. Don't ask me about it, dearest, for I can't tell you—but the worst was, at cards. They rooked me, regularly rooked

me. . . . It was like so many hawks plucking a pigeon. And so—so, Alice, my poor darling! I've dropped a biggish sum. That's about the whole story."

"Is that all? Then we two must wait longer."

"It's not all. When Eggy came up and found me, I had to make a clean breast of it. He's a queer old fish, and read me no end of a tremendous lecture. But he tackled the business and got me off with paying up at once a goodish bit less. All the same, although I begged and prayed, he declared it was his duty to wire to Eaglemont, and then the fat was in the fire."

"Has Lord Eaglemont thrown you over? Disinherited you?"

"Not quite that. But they had quite a correspondence between each other. In the end Eglinton brought me the horrid old brute's final message. 'Withdraw promised allowance for a cavalry regiment. Tell De Lacy will allow half the sum on condition he goes into West Indian regiment, if he still wishes to join the army. Otherwise, must earn his own living. Tell him he must pass exam. next week.' I know that wire by heart."

"And is there no alternative: no hope? Could you earn your living otherwise?" Alice's tone was low, her heart chill. She vaguely thought the West Indies meant snakes and yellow fever somewhere—goodness knew exactly where?

"What else but the army have I been bred up for?"

with rising passion. "I can't sweat in a bank, or a city office. He knows that."

After a miserable mutual silence, Clarence broke out again: "Yes, Eaglemont is a screw; a flinty-hearted, beastly tyrant. I did urge Eggy to try and persuade Eaglemont to make me his under-agent with a decent salary, and let me live in one of his gate-lodges. (That was thinking of you, duckie.) What with the shooting and hunting it might not be half bad; and my mother and I had one lodge for some years. But Eggy declared it was no good; he knew Eaglemont was too angry. And then he warned me—kindly enough, I'll say that for him—not to abuse my cousin before him, as he might have to report how I took it, so he hoped I would control myself. Oh, Alice, isn't it a cruel, cruel fate?"

"Cheer up. We're young still. Others have struggled through as bad," was the choking answer.

"But you will be true to me, Alice?" reiterated the unhappy lover. "If other fellows come, you won't forget your first love, Clarence, will you?"

"I'll be true." Alice could not get out another word, but she meant the few she said. "Other fellows——!" Fondly straining her gaze in the twilight to descry his features so beautiful in her eyes, she asked her heart was it likely she would wish to look at other men and him away.

Nine o'clock began to strike from the old church tower. Both started, and Clarence, rousing now,

caught his sweetheart in an almost frenzied embrace, vowing she should not, must not leave him, not for all the uncles in Christendom. No, she must stay this last time of meeting; stay longer, whatever happened.

And Alice's heart clung to her dear love, rebelling even while her wiser brain forced her lips to urge reasonableness, bade him tender farewells.

Then came a clamor of tongues in the darkness. Bamfield was shouting "Alice! Alice!" each call echoed by a childish, angry squeal. In a second Clarence bolted, disappearing behind the toolhouse. Alice darted up the nearest path, sending her voice ahead in as calm tones as she could summon.

"All right. I am coming. What's the matter?"

Hastily entering the radius of light thrown on the lawn from the drawing-room lamp, Alice beheld her uncle holding Tip fast by both wrists, whilst the child strained away passionately.

"He, he, he! Here's a pretty display of temper! Come and look at this spectacle. Ha, ha, ha! I caught her, I found the little Jezebel blacking her face and her eyelashes," cackled Bamfield with harsh laughter.

Poor Tip was a comical object, with fiery cheeks, eyebrows and lashes smudged with burnt cork, whilst sooty tears of mortification rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh, Uncle Peter. It's only a childish joke. Don't make her cry. Come to me, Amabel."

"Amabel, indeed," jeered Bamfield, releasing the captive, who flung herself into Alice's arms. "Very far from *amiable*! She disproves your theory, Eglinton, that peoples' characters take after their names."

"Don't tease her any more, please, Bamfield," urged Eglinton, in a really distressed tone, from the background. "I can't bear to see a child's feelings harrowed. Bless us all! I was everlastingly blacking my face with cork as a boy just for fun. I suppose she did it to make us laugh, and that is very amiable."

"No, I didn't. It was be—be—cause Uncle Peter's always nagging at me about my hair and—and—my eyebrows, and calling me Carrots; and I didn't make myself," spluttered Tip, who made it a point of honor to be candid like Alice; more so, for she never weakly kept back disagreeable truths. "So I wanted to see what I'd look like if I was born dark. There."

"Well, dear, go and wash your face now. I'd go with you, only Uncle Peter wants me to accompany him. Perhaps Cousin Charlotte——"

"Certainly. I'll come and tuck you in, by and by, poor Babs, poor child!" volunteered Mrs. Dundas with indiscreet effusiveness, her manner dripping honey on the not over grateful recipient. Sailing out she shot a Parthian shaft at Cousin Peter, "I must say, I applaud Tip. In my opinion it is absolutely the duty of every woman to make herself as pleasing as possible."

"Gr—r—r! Your opinion. As if you had any more right to offer an opinion than the cat," growled Bamfield.

But Charlotte shut the door upon most of his uncourteous retort.

"Bless my soul and body! Charlotte's simpering airs make me sick," he went on, turning peevishly on Alice. "A mincing, vaporish piece of affectation. You may thank your stars, Eglinton, that you are not overdone with women, like me."

"In that respect, I would change places with you gladly," returned Eglinton in a steady tone. "And it has always struck me that Mrs. Dundas has a kind heart."

"Let's get to work," muttered Bamfield, moving towards his 'cello.

It seemed to Alice that her uncle's music was less correct than usual and more unsympathetic that evening. And Eglinton seemed to feel likewise, deploring all unkindness on his violin in divine tunefullest sadness. The tones he drew from his instrument self almost brought tears to Alice's steady eyes.

Otherwise, what a desecrating ending to her last love-tryst: A childish squabble, a bandying of angry words.

CHAPTER XI.

So Clarence was gone—actually gone.

When Alice partly roused those summer mornings she wondered drowsily what burden lay on her mind. Had she to wake up and be the little slave-maiden and chief comforter of a querulous, invalid stepfather. Or, no! he was dead. She was wanted as the helper and support of her frail, weak-willed mother. . . . Nay; gone, too!

A bird chorus from the ivy on the walls, the branches that tapped the leaden lattice, set wide to the summer morning air, roused the girl's heavy head and jangled in her sick brain, starved of sleep. It was the first time in her young life since her mother died that Alice failed these nights to fall into healthy slumber lasting till dawn. So the old associations became a sediment of sadness to her present lovelornness.

"I almost hate hearing those birds," she murmured in her heart. "How can they be so happy when they must know how many others have lost their eggs, or young, or mates, through cats and bird-nesting boys? And here is this heartless sunshine again."

The glaring day must be duly faced, nevertheless; Alice buckled on her daily armor of reserve and went about her duties, sternly striving to be as cheerful as usual, forcing herself to violent spurts of energy instead of steady briskness. At Charlotte's urging she even laid a mental lash on her back and flogged herself into going to Fordhurst Lodge for a party, and facing the Marchmont girls' raillery and pitying questions as to the sad fate of "your particular friend, dear. Oh, yes—you know well enough—Mr. De Lacy."

How poor Alice's heart burned as Phyllis and Ione complacently repeated how Dickie supposed that Clarence must have got into some money-scraps—as usual. Meantime, Lady Marchmont, drawing Mrs. Dundas aside for a confidential chat, was deploring meaningly dear Alice's pale looks. The speaker hoped—she did earnestly hope—"that nice girl was not fretting after young De Lacy."

"For my boy, Dickie, speaks of him as rather a scapegrace, though so handsome and clever. Besides, he hasn't a penny, literally nothing."

In a second Cousin Charlotte's family pride was on the alert. Oho, her ladyship was jealous, was fishing. So with gentle fraud, knowing herself weak but trusting to be wily, Charlotte opened her blue eyes in larger innocence than usual.

"Oh, dear. Nothing of the kind, I do assure you. Still, perhaps you do not know that he may be heir to Lord Eaglemont." This with a falsely humble

air. "But in any case Alice is just as good friends with Mr. Eglinton, and Mr. Bamfield has taken a wonderful liking to the tutor."

"H'm, like to like," remarked her ladyship, sarcastically. "We have hardly seen the tutor since the first time, in April last, Dickie and his pupil positively dragged him to my house. As to young De Lacy, of course he may get all you say. But in life I make it a rule to believe nobody heir till the will is proved," emphasizing "in life," as if the speaker had another handy axiom for "in death."

"Alice is really very well, only I always notice that great heat tries her," went on Mrs. Dundas, vaguely feeling worsted, so falling back on a second line of entrenchments. "Besides, that dress is unbecoming." (It was one that had belonged to Alice's mother, and the girl, having altered it with her own hands, wore it for formal visits as a kind of armor, telling herself, "After all it is French.") "You have no idea" (in mild, malicious confidence) "how lovely she is without any dress, for——"

"Oh, stop, stop! How very improper! My dear soul, you are too killing. Positively, you make me scream." And Lady Marchmont's loud voice and aquiline nose reminded her dainty, ultra-refined visitor of a macaw.

"So I hear," answered Charlotte, with vexed bewilderment. Afterwards she patted herself on the back as for a premeditated sarcasm. "But I meant nothing by undressed. Only that Alice's hair is

perfectly beautiful when it is loose, but she generally screws it up too tightly; she has such a lot and thinks it a nuisance. And without her ill-fitting frock, I mean quite respectably in her bodice and petticoat, her shape is quite perfect."

"Shape is out of fashion," responded Lady Marchmont, slightly. "If girls have fluffy hair and are only tall and thin enough, all they need are two shoulder-pegs to hang a dress on to make them look smart."

Mrs. Dundas felt this was describing Phyllis and Ione to a nicety, and could have wept to find no withering retort in her quiver in defence of "her girl's" good looks, in which she secretly took great pride. Just then the three girls strolled across her line of vision on the lawn outside, and Alice's demoralized best hat and old stone-colored gown, that was darker grey wherever the sun had not faded it, caused the kind-hearted woman a pang of anguish. What were they chattering together about, carefully out of earshot, that made Alice put on her defiant look and laugh rather harshly?

"So you haven't heard from him, darling, not one little line?" twittered Phyllis. "Not a little line. But perhaps you promised to write to him first," chirped Ione.

"Not I." There was no mistaking the genuine ring in Alice's voice. "The tutor wrote to Uncle Peter and said Mr. De Lacy passed his exam. all right, and was going to stay with his own people.

What is he going to do afterwards? Why, go for drill to the Curragh, and next June to—to his regiment, so Mr. Eglinton wrote."

"Hard-hearted creature!"

"She is positively inhuman——"

"You two are not going in for any more French lessons this summer?" asked Alice, abruptly.

"Oh, dear no! We have far too much to do, what with running up to town and golf. The lessons are all very well for winter, when there are no men about."

Half an hour later, Alice came up to Mrs. Dundas and whispered rather grimly:

"How much longer do you want to stay? It's deadly dull to my mind, but if you are enjoying yourself——"

Mrs. Dundas suddenly perceived that Alice was looking pale, with a strained expression. Could there be some truth in Lady Marchmont's suggestion? She at once kindly agreed to return, agreeing it was dull; and only waited for one more cup of tea; and then to talk in passing to just this friend and one word to that one for some twenty minutes. Lastly, she fluttered after the Seraph, and entreated him so tenderly to come and see them very soon at The Grove that he looked surprised, and Alice glum. "What do you want Mr. Sheppard for so specially?" asked the girl.

"Oh—nothing. Only I thought you would like him, my dear," confided Charlotte in a tone of min-

gled caress and pity. She was thinking, quite pleased with herself, "one nail drives out another."

Alas! dismay followed when Alice said, drily: "Phyllis has just confided to me that he and she understand each other, but only we are to know that, as old friends. It means, Ione says, that her mother will allow them to marry in a year if nobody better comes forward. Phyllis will think you are running after him."

"But, my dear child, it was for you, Alice, darling. You don't suppose I thought of that young man? How was I to guess——" Cousin Charlotte fairly floundered in apology.

"Then, please, in future don't think for me. It would be better to leave me to do that for myself," begged Alice, admonishingly.

All the way home it was hard work to bear Charlotte's almost whimpering explanations, that were reiterated in a gentle monotone, maddening because never ending. Alice at last felt as if she must shriek.

"I am really horrid. She means it so well," the girl bitterly accused herself, when at last in blessed solitude. Next, her conscience stabbed her because of the hideous untruth she had told the Marchmonts. Still, it was not exactly a lie! He wrote me not one, but two or three big lines, contended her other self. "And he begged me on no account to write till he was at the Curragh, for his mother was so sharp and kept the eye of a hawk on his correspondence."

How mortified had Alice felt! To think the adorable being, whom she secretly worshipped afar—Clarence's own mother—would scout the idea of that young man's engagement to a girl who would gladly be cut up in little bits for him. But Clarence in fairness bade his sweetheart consider the other side of the question. His mother idolized him. She intended him to be Eaglemont's heir, to marry a fortune. Nothing, nobody was too good for her boy. In time it would all come right. There was no earthly good in telling Mrs. O'Beirne now, or Eaglemont either. No; he, Clarence, must go out to the West Indies and look about him. Then in a year or two——"

But now, alone, Alice no longer threw dust in her own eyes. It would be several years, if not many, before Clarence could afford a wife; for, as he was first to own ruefully, his tastes were horribly expensive, and it was the deuce for a junior subaltern to marry. Years! And always Uncle Peter would be growing poorer, because since Alice knew him his retrenchments had been steady; and Alice would be ever more heartsick with hope deferred, while little Tip would be getting older, hungrier, bigger to clothe.

CHAPTER XII.

A MONTH after Clarence's hurried departure, Eglinton, who had accompanied his pupil without any special leave-taking, walked into The Grove, to the amazement of its household.

Alice flushed, which with her was rare and gave her a charming touch of softness. Her eyes fell and her heart was beating hard as Eglinton held her hand a few seconds longer than usual, looking in his short-sighted way scrutinizingly in her face. How she longed to cry, "*How is he?*" "You back? What brought you?" screeched Tip, as usual saying what the others were thinking.

"The train," was the quiet reply. Then glancing rather deprecatingly round. "There were some things here to be settled up. So I thought it just as well to come back for a few days."

"Well, I'm very glad, if nobody else is," cried Tip, capering round him and hooking a lean arm affectionately about his neck.

"That's very nice of you. Thank you, dear," said Eglinton, with a humble gratitude in his voice that touched his hearers.

Suddenly it struck Alice, "Here is someone who is lonely, too. Be kindly to him."

"But, Amabel, we are all very pleased to see Mr. Eglington again," corrected Mrs. Dundas, effusively. "Only, of course" (this to the new comer), "we miss that delightful boy sadly. We were really quite fond of him."

"So was I—I miss him, too," replied Clarence's sheep-dog, drearily.

At that Alice's heart, touched first to pity, warmed towards the poor ex-tutor in sympathy. She blurted out the question sticking in her throat:

"How is Mr. De Lacy? Tell us all you can about him."

Settling himself down, reassured of his welcome, Eglington obeyed. But after all he had merely nursed Clarence safely over his exam. in London, then seen him off to stay awhile with the O'Beirnes at Cheltenham.

"Poor—poor—fellow!" lamented Mrs. Dundas. (Alice could have slapped her with pleasure.) "Well! I shall always say that Lord Eaglemont has treated him abominably. Promising to put him in a cavalry regiment as his heir, and now!——" The end of the sentence was tragically left to imagination.

"But did he promise him all that?" asked Eglington, looking bewildered. "Clarence never told me so. I thought that what you say—everything—was more or less conditional."

"Not at all. Very likely, you being much older, he would hardly open his heart to you. But he told us—did he not, Alice? Indeed, we amused ourselves helping him to choose between hussar and lancer regiments."

"I did not know. In fact, I supposed the West Indian alternative was always in the air," repeated Eglinton, plainly hurt at having been less in his late pupil's confidence than he had supposed. "We were good friends, too; or so at least I hoped."

In his mortification he passed his hand through his hair, that was thin at the top and bushy behind. Tip swooped upon him and slapped his fingers.

"Don't do that. You've rumbled your hair till it looks like a cockatoo's crest. Now I must pat it down for you." Which she proceeded to do. The process, which might have discomposed most persons, seemed to have a curiously soothing effect on its recipient. Alice applied a last healing balm by saying, heartily:

"Of course you were good friends. But what between his reading and the selfish way Uncle Peter always monopolizes you—By-the-way, it is a shame not to let him know you are here. He will be so pleased. Run, Amabel, or else I shall have to go myself."

"But tell us about Lord Eaglemont," pursued Charlotte, still harping on the same theme. "Of course you are a friend, so we don't expect you to say anything against him. Only, honestly, what do you think of him? Do you really like him?"

"No, I don't much," admitted Eglinton, hesitatingly. "Still he means well."

Barnfield came just then at his best pace, dragging one leg a little, from the end of the potato rows.

"H'm! h'm!" he grunted harshly, sounds intended to convey satisfaction, while he sawed his friend's arm up and down. "Ready for some music this evening, eh? All right."

"I have taken the liberty of hoping you will help me out of a dilemma—or rather Miss Barnfield, as housekeeper," began the Nondescript, in his gentlest tones, "Lord Eaglemont—or rather his keeper, who doubtless had orders to do so—has sent me a monster salmon that I could not eat in a calendar month. So—I brought you the responsibility and laid it in Mrs. Tozer's arms."

"Eh, eh! What? . . . But you—you, my dear fellow," stammered Barnfield, nonplussed between craving for the long untasted dainty and a sense of shabby behavior. A mental struggle was visible, as his white beard worked with twitchings. Then, to the universal surprise, he burst out:

"Well! Then, we insist upon it, you must come to help us eat it. What, eh, Alice? Don't we? Yes, come to-night. You're by yourself, so that's all right."

That was all wrong in Alice's secret opinion, but she could not grudge the lonely man what little enlivenment dinner at The Grove might afford. Mrs. Dundas, however, coughed and observed, dolefully:

"We were just hearing about the unhappy exile, Peter."

"Who?"

"Why, our favorite, Clarence De Lacy. Think of him doomed to Jamaica. Is it not too, too sad?"

"Sad! What bosh is the woman talking now? Exile, indeed! If he only ever knows half as much about exile as Eglinton and myself you might pity him. Eh, what?"

"Certainly this deep compassion seems to me unnecessary," agreed Eglinton, smiling. "I believe, Mrs. Dundas, that Jamaica is far more beautiful than you know, and not nearly so unhealthy as you apparently imagine."

"Jamaica! Is he going there?" asked Peter, his attention suddenly roused. Then aloud to himself, wagging his head, and to Alice's amazement: "That's where I ought to go—where I have long thought of going. Only the expense! . . . Dear me—yes!"

They were all gathered on the lawn, in the shade of the house, where Mrs. Dundas had almost been caught by Eglinton darning some old fine silk stockings, which she hurriedly hid in a deep workbag. Alice went on, undisturbed, making strawberry nets. Condescending to sit awhile in idleness, Peter's eyes furtively travelled round the group, vexed to see his soliloquy had brought universal attention to bear upon himself.

"Well! What is there to gape at, Charlotte?"

he demanded in sarcastic geniality. "You know well enough how much our family had to do with Jamaica. It will soon be the time to look out for Rintinella here at nights. August, isn't it, when she cries through the house and squats under the cellar?"

Mrs. Dundas gave a small scream and covered her ears with both hands rather affectedly.

"*Don't!* My dear Peter! Remember the horrible moanings I heard myself two years ago. Yes, Alice, you said it was the cat. But all I know is, that's why I paid a visit last July to the Mowbray Dundases."

"All right, and it's to be hoped you are going back to them this August," interrupted Peter gruffly. "If you're such a poor specimen of a Bamfield as to be afraid of the ghost of an old negress. Why! even little Tip here, who is a Sumner, has more pluck."

"I'm not afraid of ghosts," declared Tip in a shrill voice, but Eglinton, against whom she was leaning affectionately, felt the child squirm. "And Alice doesn't believe in Rintinella one little bit."

"Yes, I do. I believe there was an old slave of that name who did a great kindness to our ancestor William Bamfield, out in Jamaica, in reward for which, when he was freed, he brought her to England," replied Alice, stolidly netting. "But that is no reason why her spirit should be restless. Certainly I've neither heard nor seen anything any August, when Rintinella is said to haunt the house."

"Ah! but you are not of a mediumistic tempera-

ment," observed Mrs. Dundas, mysteriously. "However—ahem!" She glanced at Tip, then signalled with her eyebrows at the others, as if that precocious young person were suddenly blind and deaf. The latter contemptuously retaliated:

"You're wrinkling your forehead, and when I did that the other day you said it made me look quite old."

"I've got something to see after, if you will all excuse me," said Alice, putting aside her shuttle and net. "You might help me, Tip." And walking her little step-sister off, she confided: "It's about dinner. We want fresh flowers and a lot more green peas, besides salad. Then goodness knows if Uncle Peter expects more than just carrot soup, the man's own fish and yesterday's duck with half the breast filled up with potato. It is the most extraordinary event! Now, if it had only happened when Mr. De Lacy was here. He would have made things go."

"He would. He'd have eaten such a lot. As it was, Uncle Peter saw him once at tea and called him the Cormorant," sniggered Tip, prancing in unusual excitement.

Alice felt hurt at the child's fickleness. She did not know how deep an impression Eglinton's defence of her eyebrow-blackening had made on Tip: nor that Clarence had—actually! forgotten to say good-bye to Miss Sumner in his hasty leave-taking.

Meanwhile, Bamfield was telling his guest something more about the alleged ghost, for Eglinton confessed to curiosity as to Rintinella.

"Briefly, the story," said Peter, "is as follows:—In early Jacobin days the Bamfield family inherited The Grove, through marriage. One William Bamfylde, as the name was then spelled, chanced to be implicated in the Monmouth rebellion, and was sought for by the Government troops. The unhappy youth, who was under eighteen years of age, was discovered after some days, hiding in a culvert under the highroad, nearly starved."

"The very place is there to this day," put in Charlotte.

"Well! Could a spot run away?" snapped Peter. Pleased at the snub, he went on addressing Eglinton, with wagging white beard and out-thrust finger.

"Of course unlucky William Bamfylde was haled to prison and tried at the Bloody Assizes, when he was sentenced to be hanged. However, some of the county gentry managed to bribe Judge Jeffreys; so the poor lad was eventually let off with his life, but transported to Jamaica, like other rebels, and there sold as a slave. It is said the price paid for him by a planter was fifteen hogsheads of rum and some tea. Now, I'd like to read you out Bamfylde's adventures that a grand-uncle of mine wrote down in a family album. It is a strange history, for in the end William was freed and returned to England, where he bought back this very house in which he ended his days."

"It will interest me immensely. Might we not have it this evening?" suggested Eglinton, rising to

take his leave. "Perhaps Miss Bamfield will not mind hearing it again."

"Mind! She has never heard it properly told. Besides, whoever doesn't like it may stay away," answered Peter, in his most despotic tone.


CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT a blessing, thought Alice to herself, that the dreaded ordeal of dinner was over at last. For once, Uncle Peter, instead of praise of her management, found fault with everything.

"Hallo! hallo! Poor soup this, missie!" he would criticise, with the air of a gourmet. Then loftily, "You must excuse our shortcomings, Eglinton. My little housekeeper is young, you see; but it is a pity you should happen on such unusually bad pot-luck!"

And poor Alice, with hot heart and cherry-red cheeks, sat mute, frowning down occasionally Tip's symptoms of bursting into open revolt.

Eglinton played the pleased guest to perfection, however; he was quite a revelation, as Charlotte afterwards declared. The way he laughed aside Bamfield's disagreeable remarks and beamed on anyone, while he ate very little meat, wisely, though revelling in vegetables and fruit, of which there were plenty, made Alice bless the poor tutor's kind heart. Besides, his shyness seemed fled. In truth, he was so anxious to help Alice in her difficult position that he had forgotten to think of himself and what impression he was making. So, succeeding in turning



the talk on travelling and foreign parts, he told amusing stories for Mrs. Dundas and Tip, was full of solid information for Peter, and almost—not quite—succeeded in rousing Alice from gloomy forebodings as to the custards she had hurriedly whipped, and whether her cheese-straws would crumble disgracefully, or stay bound in faggots. Lastly, with the deepest gravity, Eglinton sipped the thin claret at which Bamfield smacked his lips and cocked his eye, inquiring:

“What do you think of this, eh? Got it a bargain; a tip from a good judge. Ve—ry nice sound wine—eh, what?”

Thereat Tip impulsively bruised Alice’s ankles with a volley of kicks. Afterwards she explained:

“It was only some of that *vin ordinaire* he brought over from Dinan—you know! Three bottles that were left of what mother used to take at lunch. And there are dozens of bottles all over cobwebs and dust down in that cellar. I saw them—for he asked me to hold a candle. ‘Why on earth don’t you try some of these?’ I said. And he looked round at them so queerly and then nearly bit my head off, saying:

“‘No, no, child. Those can’t be touched. They’re no good—they’re mostly gone bad!’”

“What a pity!” said Alice, regretfully. “Now, if we ever had a ham to boil—but there! It would be too expensive.” She little thought then how odd that remark would one day seem. But in the end,

the dinner went off better than could have been expected. All depended upon Bamfield's temper. And he, thanks to his guest's air of serene enjoyment, besides the reflection that after all the feast had calmed his conscience and cost him little, became quite gay over dessert. He produced some rum, of which he himself partook, although Eglinton declined.

"Grand stuff! Warms the blood, eh—what?" declared Peter, dipping the rusty part of his white beard in the thick, fiery fluid with almost tremulous joy, then draining the last drop with gusto, and sucking the hair on his upper lip. "That I call a real treat. I get some bottles sent over from my Jamaica estate every year by my agent out there. What? Did you not know I had a place out there? It's the self-same that was left by old William the rebel. All gone to the deuce now. My agent tries to make me pay for repairs after hurricanes and the Lord knows what: but you can't get blood out of a stone, as I wrote to him. . . . Why not sell? Do you say. Well—because—because . . . Anyway, that rum is about all the good they do me. But I ought to go out myself. Yes. I am resolved to do that . . . Still, it's a frightful expense."

Peter Bamfield's tone was so gloomily absent-minded that Eglinton watched him surprised. So did Alice, stirred through all her being by a new, joyous idea. What if Uncle Peter were to take her out there!

After coffee Peter invited Eglinton to smoke in the study, as he termed his own most unstudious den, one of the oldest rooms in the ancient house. Deep recesses in its thick walls were filled with safes, locked cupboards, or dusty shelves of curiosities from the South Seas, China, and India.

"And Alice, who has young eyes, can read us the history of her ancestor," said he, pointedly excluding Charlotte and Tip, to their disappointment. In the study, Bamfield opened a safe, and thence extracting a bunch of keys, bade Alice unlock a low cupboard, to which his joints were reluctant to stoop.

"There are only some papers here besides two books, an album, and a big family Bible. Shall I bring both?" asked Alice, on her knees.

"No, no, no! Do as I bid you," returned Peter, testily. "Bring the album. Leave that Bible alone—*d'ye hear!*" Scrambling up in wonder at his sudden crossness, Alice turned over the faded pages where gaudily painted birds alternated with excruciatingly fine etchings, below which were inscriptions to dead and gone Lizzies and Alices, with dates ranging from 1780 to 1820. Towards the end came pages filled with the careful caligraphy of the age of letter-writing. It was headed:

"A rough sketch of William Bamfylde's Life; especially his Sufferings as a Slave, and his later Adventures in Jamaica: written by one of his Descendants."

Skimming over, at her uncle's bidding, the earlier portion which he had already related to Eglinton, Alice took up the history when the unhappy youth was sent to his owner's sugar plantation. "In his old age this part of his life was most disagreeable for our ancestor to dwell upon. Only with difficulty could he be persuaded to describe the horrible sufferings of mind and body he then underwent, when wearing chains as a prisoner he was forced to work under a burning sun all day and to herd with negroes in a mere hut of mud and cane at night. At dawn, the slaves roused to the crack of the overseer's whip, which many a time descended on William Bamfylde's back till he learnt at last to feign that he no longer remembered he was a white man who had once tasted the happiness of freedom. Three gangs of slaves used to go forth to labor in the canefields—the strong negroes; the weakly men and the women; lastly, negresses recovering from illness, and children. Young Bamfylde, being only eighteen years of age and suffering from weakness, the result of prison-fever in England, besides the miseries of close confinement in chains on shipboard, was sent out at first with the second gang. Thus he made the close acquaintance of a negress called Rintinella.

"Some six months after William Bamfylde had begun his plantation life, a secret rising was planned among the negroes on this and several adjoining estates. The young white slave was among those who swore secrecy, taking the fetich oath at dead

of night, pledged in a cup of rum and blood. It was agreed that all the neighboring estate owners and overseers should be murdered. But Bamfylde demurred to the negroes' wish to kill all the white women, and children also, even to babes at the breast. He afterward said this feeling of pity arose from having seen his master's little daughter, Alice Carnegie, playing in the verandah by which he daily passed. To this compassion he owed his life. For the ringleaders, distrusting him somewhat, refused to admit him to their innermost council. They were betrayed when their plot was on the eve of execution, for the sake of the same sweet-faced child, Alice. The latter had a black nurse, whose prayer that at least her former foster-babe might be spared, was spurned by the conspirators. Thereupon, the faithful woman gave timely warning, and the chief rebels, whom she denounced, were seized and condemned with horrid vengeance by a court of planters. One slave was roasted alive over a slow fire. Two others were starved to death in cages, exposed on Kingston parade, one living seven, the other nine days.

"Although Bamfylde escaped implication, he and his fellow slaves were thenceforth treated with increased severity, so that, finding life unbearable, he took counsel with his devoted ally, Rintinella, resolved to end his sufferings either by death or by seeking a precarious existence as a fugitive slave. It was not until nearly two years later, however, that he

and she found a chance to steal away in company of a third slave. Being missed and pursued, they separated, Bamfylde refusing to abandon Rintinella, who was the weakest of the three. Thanks to her shrewdness, he and she eluded the trackers, and at night safely reached the mountains that fill most of the interior of the island. The negro, on the other hand, was recaptured and his leg cut off, to prevent his attempting future flight. Bamfylde, relating this in after days, used to add, cynically, that he himself would probably in like case have suffered hanging or dismemberment, as was not an infrequent sentence on runaways in those days, when, by law, two planters could sit as judges in a slave court.

"Once in the mountains, Rintinella led her companion through the immense woods that, rising steeply for some miles, made the hill bases a safe retreat from all but small parties of pursuers, who must needs often creep in single file through the dense undergrowth. Climbing higher, the runaways took refuge at last with the Maroons, dwelling in almost inaccessible mountain places. The said Maroons were free negro mountaineers, the descendants of escaped slaves, and whose numbers were continually swelled by more.

"For some seven or eight years William Bamfylde lived thus the life of an outlaw among savages, together with his faithful companion Rintinella, who was accounted his wife. Recognizing his superior intelligence, the Maroons made him one of their fore-

most chiefs. And Bamfylde, smarting under his recent wrongs, roused his dusky followers' ferocious courage to fresh raids upon the white population of the lowlands, such as the Maroons had often hitherto practised, but in a more desultory fashion. Under his guidance, relentless and unceasing attacks were made upon the low-lying estates, at different points, burning cane-fields here, looting dwelling-houses there; the outlaws always retreating with their booty to caves, or hill villages perched on ledges only gained by a single precipitous track. Roused by their common danger, the planters banded together, and their skirmishing parties retaliated by penetrating far and unexpectedly into the hills. There followed times of desperate and hazardous fighting for both sides. The Maroons, however, generally gained the victory, being invisible foes who rolled down rocks, and planned unlikely ambushes. Besides, if even cut off from their haunts and scattered, they lived easily on roots and wild fruit, quenching thirst by cutting a certain creeper (*vitus Indica*), which emitted a flow of clear water.

"At last the wearied planters recognized that their wisest way of securing peace was to treat secretly with William Bamfylde, offering him by letter, which he alone could read, freedom and full pardon if he would leave the Maroons leaderless and return to England. This last condition he refused, preferring Jamaica while his fortunes were broken; and bargaining that he must receive a sum of money.

and be made overseer on the Carnegie estate, where his severe master was dead, and the plantation passed into the hands of its young heiress. This being agreed to by Alice Carnegie's guardians, Bamfylde returned to the scene of his former tribulations, quitting the Maroons secretly and leaving with them Rintinella and a boy of six, born to her in the mountains. A year later he married Alice Carnegie, whose heart was stirred by the tale of his sufferings and the fact that for her sake, although he was still a child, he had always guarded the Carnegie house from marauding attack by the Maroons, while not scrupling to ravage the estate to punish her father.

"Left to themselves, the Maroons disbanded, and it was not till later days that, growing again dangerous, they were only put down by the importation of Cuban bloodhounds, before which even their fierceness quailed. Most were then shamefully deported to Nova Scotia, although promised pardon on surrender; but a remnant suffered to stay became peaceful inhabitants.

"Thus, after enduring two years of life as a slave and six as a hunted outlaw, William Bamfylde, about the age of twenty-seven, settled down as the owner of a fine sugar estate and of an idolized young wife. But Fortune, which for three years seemed to smile upon him, once more proved unkind, and bereft him of Alice, his beloved helpmate, who died in childbed, leaving him the sole care of an infant daughter.

The latter was reared with great affection by the otherwise stern parent, and married at the age of twenty Lieutenant Francis Wilmot of His Majesty's navy. It was for the sake of Alice Wilmot, who wished to rejoin her husband, then ordered on home service, that William Bamfylde at last returned to England, where he bought back the family estate and house called The Grove, situate at Fordhurst, in the County of Kent.

"Here he ended his days in the year 1763, being ninety-three years of age, and still tough, having outlived both his daughter and her sons; and being succeeded in his property by his great-grandson, then only three years old, William Carnegie Wilmot Bamfylde."

CHAPTER XIV.

"THAT'S all," cried Alice. Then in a puzzled voice: "But I can't understand about Rintinella? I always thought she came over to England with Bamfylde. But here she seems to have been his wife, and then died in the mountains—else he could not have married again."

"He, he, he! His wife. Well, that's a good one," cackled Peter. "Why, my dear child, a black wife doesn't count. Our ancestor married Alice Carnegie right enough." Then, emptying his pipe, he winked knowingly at Eglinton, behind his niece's back.

"It says here distinctly they were married by Maroon laws," returned Alice, setting her finely-cut mouth tight. "And all I can say is, if he left the woman behind who helped to save his life and married another it was dishonorable. No wonder there has been a curse on the family ever since, and that the property has never passed direct from father to son. What do you say, Mr. Eglinton?"

The latter hesitated. He had not responded to Peter's confidential gesture. Instead, his eyes were

turned on Alice's open face and indignant expression, and he was thinking to himself how easy it seems in youth to see the barrier-line between right and wrong. Alas! as one grows older, it is no longer black here, white there, but both merge insensibly into different shades of grey, each seeming but little darker than its fellow.

"H'm. We don't quite know what the Maroon laws were," hazarded Eglinton, feeling that both Peter and Alice expected him to answer agreeing with each. "They may have had patriarchal views, like Abraham and Isaac, in which case Rintinella would not have thought herself aggrieved."

Although the suggestion was made with tactful diffidence, its owner winced at the look of scorn that gleamed in Alice's clear eyes. She replied, shortly:

"William Bamfylde was supposed to be an English gentleman. And in any case he sneaked off, leaving his wife and son behind in wretchedness."

"Well, it was only what negroes were born to," said Peter, testily. "For goodness sake, don't argue, Alice. An arguing woman is unbearable. As Mr. Eglinton rightly says, Rintinella knew very well she had nothing to complain of. The best proof of this is that when Alice Bamfylde died, Rintinella managed to come down from the mountains and lived in the house as nurse to the infant Alice, or something of the kind. And her half-bred son afterwards became an agent to Bamfylde, under the name of Williamson. What is more, John Williamson, one of his

descendants, is my agent at this very day on the very same estate out there. Eh, Eglinton, that's patriarchal, if you like! As to Rintinella, she came over to England with her master and died in this very house, a very old woman, though no one knew her exact age."

"How do you know all that? There is nothing more in this album," asked Alice, greatly interested, turning over the leaves of the book.

"No. I found it—I found it," answered Peter, vaguely, as he refilled his pipe with care, "in one of the papers in that cupboard. Yes—that was how I read it."

"Oh, may I see?" asked Alice, with eager, parted lips and smiling eyes. Next instant light and gladness vanished under a sudden shock, for——

"No!" thundered Peter, slamming one hand on the table and taking his pipe out of his mouth with the other. "You leave my papers alone, if you please, miss. I'll have no meddling with them."

Both his hearers stared at him, so amazed at this seemingly unaccountable outburst that Alice, thinking her uncle gone mad, did not trouble her head about his unkindness to herself; while Eglinton wondered whether the recluse might be given to such occasional fits of morbid anger. At that moment, through the silence, came from some distant part of the house a long-drawn wail. All three started, Peter so violently that he dropped his pipe on the floor.

"What's that? My God, is that she?" asked the old man, shaking and looking feebly round at Alice, who had sprung to her feet, listening intently. "*Is it Rintinella?*" went on Peter, whispering. "I thought I did hear her one year—but I wasn't sure."

"I don't know, but I will go and see. I believe myself it's only some nonsense—perhaps a village child in the road," declared Alice. She was out of the room like a whirlwind next instant. As she afterward owned to Eglinton, she might have been afraid if she had allowed herself more time.

"Shall I go and see, too," asked Eglinton, preparing to follow with the calm of a philosopher interested in psychical research.

But Bamfield put out a hand in trembling protest. "No—please. Don't leave me."

Back came Alice, and put her bright face in at the door, announcing, briefly:

"Only Tip. She and Cousin Charlotte were playing 'Old Maid,' and Tip got the queen three times running."

"Nonsense. It—it didn't sound from the drawing-room," returned Bamfield, suspiciously, only half convinced.

"One can never tell how sounds come, especially in an old house like this, so oddly built," remarked Eglinton, cheerfully.

"Well, it's not anything else that I can find out; and Tip owns she did howl," declared Alice, squaring her jaw. "So, now, I'll join them, I think. Mr.

Eglinton, if Uncle Peter can't stoop to that cupboard, perhaps you will kindly help him to lock it."

This was her only revenge for Uncle Peter's charge of curiosity; the door closed immediately. Bamfield grunted to himself, as he slowly finished his pipe. Presently he remarked that, though they were later than usual that night, it might be better to have some music than none, so they would rejoin the ladies.

As Eglinton heartily agreed, they did so. And on the whole the evening ended fairly successfully.

CHAPTER XV.

"MORE spice and more brown sugar. I wish I'd never began this job," grumbled Alice to herself, as she gazed ruefully at six splendid, old Chinese jars set arow, gaping at her with silent remarks that they were not one-quarter full, and were prepared to accommodate quantities more of pot-pourri.

They had been filled with old pot-pourri when Alice came to The Grove. So old was it that Peter—even Uncle Peter—had sniffed contemptuously thereat this last spring, and requested his niece to throw out the rotten stuff.

"And yet it seems a pity," he added, ruefully. "I remember dried roseleaves in those jars when I was a small child. The old house won't know itself without any. But there—some things won't last, more's the pity."

"I'll make some. We have heaps and heaps of roseleaves going to waste," Alice had offered, impulsively. Somehow The Grove had a life of its own, dimly perceived and respected in her mind.

She did not like the notion of her forefathers' old home going without something to which it was accustomed.

"Stuff and nonsense. It will cost a lot besides roseleaves, and I can't afford anything on mere luxuries. If you want it, you must pay for the spices yourself," was the rough answer.

"All right," replied Alice, brusquely. Uncle Peter's frequent taunt of paying for things herself never failed to rouse in her breast the mute defiance: "I will—if I can." This time, in a sudden rage with grudging fortune, but chancing to find her slender purse lined with the month's money, she could, and did. Now she regretted the extravagance, small though it was. For, oh, dear! this had been an expensive spring. Many a time Alice had dipped her hand in her pocket because of—Clarence De Lacy. A new ribbon, a fresh necktie, mere trifles that cost little and made her hope she looked fairer in her lover's eyes. But they mounted up. Besides, unlucky Tip had burnt one frock and torn another hopelessly when bird-nesting. There was nothing for it but to economize for the rest of this year. *He*, alas, would not be here to note her old gown and home-dyed hat.

There came a knock at the library door, a gentle knock, sounding its own apology. Who on earth —? "*Come in!*" called out Alice, hastily concluding that as this was the gardener's one day in the week at The Grove, he wanted to ask for his wages

long due, poor man. What could she do, for Uncle Peter never paid unless almost forced to do so?

But a very different voice, an especially pleasant one, replied :

"This is rather an early visit, I am afraid. Only Tip told me you were here and urged me to come and find you. I happened to meet her in the lane, and said—h'm—that I might be going in fact I must be unless—one never quite knows how things may turn out."

Eglinton was stammering, but Alice did not notice his hesitancy. ("Bother Tip!") That was her first thought. The second and better was, that seeing the ex-tutor was here she could use the opportunity to extract more news about Clarence. So, with her mind full of this, but not quite certain how to begin, she answered, vaguely :

"You are quite an old friend now, so I don't mind admitting you to these stillroom secrets. It is confusion here, isn't it?"

"It is a charming scene!" exclaimed Eglinton, with admiration that made itself felt as genuine, in spite of his carefully trained manner and voice, that were always so quietly civil.

The leaded casements were set wide open, and shafts of morning sunshine streamed through close-growing bushes outside, into the ancient room, all lined with beautifully grained oak wainscot, its panels filled with faded calf-bound volumes. The floor was strewn with newspapers on which roseleaves

were thickly scattered. And midmost knelt Alice in a fresh print gown, once blue but almost white from frequent washings. Eglinton neither guessed nor would have heeded that. Had he known Alice had scrubbed and ironed it herself yesterday, its value would have been increased tenfold in his eyes, that rested with humble admiration on his divinity. Alice had rolled back her sleeves, and her beautifully shaped arms were revealed in their plump curves, ending in those small, firm hands, that were her chief beauty. They were plunging now in the vases, stirring up the mixture, adding brown sugar, spices, rose petals.

("How her hair shines like burnished gold! And what an honest complexion—a trifle too sunburnt, but so clear. Her dress and herself suit—nothing for show but all for good work, wholesome, clean, sweet to the heart's core. . . . Now or never. . . . I must begin, but how—how?") So Eglinton's thoughts were wildly stumbling over each other, while his feet picked their way awkwardly between the rose heaps to a refuge he espied.

"That's an old Bible box—don't sit on that, please," called Alice, hastily. "That other—well, yes, that is my three times great-grandmother's bride-chest—that'll do."

A bride-chest! A good omen. Eglinton found himself speaking as in a dream, harking back to his former beginning about going away, unless—if, indeed, he might dare to hope he would be missed—
then—

"Oh, we shall miss you—yes, more than you think," came from Alice in a curious voice, as if she was looking into the future. In truth, she was hardly listening, and she was counting to herself ("One handful of sugar or two here? . . . The man has put me out of my count! Which jar did I put the last in?").

In her distraction she never heeded that Eglinton was still saying something in his beard on the same topic, dropping his voice more and more.

A brief silence followed.

"Now some cloves and allspice——" calculated Alice inwardly, when she received a mental shock.

"Miss Bamfield, will you not answer me something, *good or bad?*"

Alice looked around, affrighted at the strong-sounding words. A man's wounded soul, braced to bear the worst, expecting it, yet cherishing a feeble flame of hope far within, had sent forth the cry. The human voice when full-laden with emotion touches another's human heart as powerfully, as truly, as the grip of the muscles affect the flesh. Alice quivered, pained by feeling she had caused pain unwittingly.

"What must I say?" she breathed, looking up like a frightened child. Then she understood.

Eglinton was looking at her like a man who had suddenly dropped a mask that merely resembled his face. Living features, rugged but powerful, kindly, were working with emotion; grey eyes were lit up

by a strange brightness that transfigured them to beauty. What was there in their glance that told of utter devotion, deepest chivalrous respect? How did Alice realize at once that here was love—no passing fancy, however strong, but a good man's whole being, body and soul, instinct with love for herself, a flaming altar to her—her. Through her agitation she heard him say quietly, almost sadly:

"I have been asking you to marry me? Will you not put me out of misery?"

"Oh, I *am* so sorry, but I can't," murmured Alice, penitently. She could not explain afterwards to herself why it was that her words seemed to come out without her will choosing them; and so she found herself feeling and speaking in real sorrow, almost abject apology. "No matter how much I like you, and I do—we all like you very, very much!—it is quite impossible, because, because——"

"Because someone else has won your heart? I see—I see it in your face. *Not Clarence?* Miss Bamfield, tell me one thing. Forgive me! But I earnestly hope and pray you do not mean De Lacy."

"Why should I tell you? Why should you hope and pray against it? But there!—I am not ashamed of caring for him. I do. It is Clarence De Lacy that I have promised to marry. He is devoted to me. He was from the very first day we met."

"Ah! So was I."

As Alice flung out her wrathful challenge against the opponent of her best beloved, anger enwrapped

her so that she neither rightly saw nor cared how Eglinton took the blow. But calming down, she perceived he had risen and was standing with his back to her in a window embrasure, looking out into the garden. Moments passed, and pity for him, besides some apprehensions for herself and Clarence, began to fill Alice's mind. At last she spoke low:

"I appeal to your honor not to mention this to any one. It is a secret engagement."

"Your least wish is law to me. You may count on my silence."

"And you—you will be my friend still? Oh, please, please, Mr. Eglinton, do not be angry with me, with both of us. Clarence is really very fond of you; and so, in a way, am I."

A strangled sound that might have been as well a sob as a laugh came from the window. Next, the answer, in measured, somewhat bitterly spoken words:

"You do not remember your Philip van Artevelde, if you ever read him:

*'Lucky is the maid
That can convert a lover to a friend.'*

Well—it depends partly on the man. Yes. I will still be your friend—if you will allow me. And as your friend, forgive me if I ask, is it wise—for yourself—to keep this engagement secret? I cannot see any reason for it."

"Oh, it is because we are both so poor. We cannot afford to marry for years, you see." And Clarence says that it would never do, if his mother or Lord Eaglemont were to know of it."

"H'm. Mrs. O'Beirne, of course, as she tells everyone, wishes her son to marry money, or, anyhow, to make a great match. She is foolish; still that may be excused in a mother with an only child. But has not Lord Eaglemont been fairly kind and considerate for a second cousin? He surely has earned the right to learn what affects the future happiness of his young kinsman?"

"From what I make out, he is a tyrant. Of course he did educate Clarence, and give him an allowance; but, as Clarence says, he never missed that out of his thousands a year. Then, having raised the hope, the expectation of being put in a cavalry regiment with a fair income, what does his lordship do? For one foolish action; because an open-hearted young fellow was entrapped into losing some money—what I dare say hundreds and thousands of young men do every day, as Clarence said to me—there he is cut down; cruelly punished: under orders to go to a deadly climate. Yes, yes; Jamaica may not be so bad, but Sierra Leone may kill him! And if it does—well, I shall pray that Lord Eaglemont may never know a moment's peace on earth."

Alice's tone was tragic. Her eyes flashed, and her generally smooth brows were knit, as she seemed to gaze into futurity past the cedar tree outside. Eg-

linton turned quickly and watched her. Then he muttered, in hasty deprecation :

"It by no means follows that De Lacy should remain always in a West Indian regiment. Lots of chaps exchange from that into the cavalry. And if he only shows that he means to steady down, Eaglemont might—indeed, we may hope he very likely will—give him another chance."

"What! Do you really think so? You believe he might?" joyfully. "It was silly of me to abuse him to you, who are his great friend; but you won't betray me, will you?"

"I could never betray you. And, though I am his closest friend, if it ever came to choosing between your interests and his, I should chuck him overboard. Only, believe me, you and Clarence ought to trust him and tell him of your engagement."

"But how can we? I can't write to him myself, and I am sure Clarence won't; at least not until he gets away from his mother's house to the Curragh in autumn," queried Alice, in a dismally confidential tone. She was no longer kneeling, but sitting beside the Chinese jars, with both hands clasped round her knees.

"I will let him know, if you give me leave," said Eglinton, quickly, in a decided manner.

"What! You! *You?*"

"Yes. You have asked me to be your friend. I happen to know that what Lord Eaglemont has always hoped for from Clarence was confidence. This

will please him. Besides, he takes my opinion more often than that of anyone else, and I shall tell him that De Lacy will be most lucky, and possibly (though, mind you, not certainly) steadied for life, if you marry him."

"If! Of course I shall."

"I ought to have said when you do. Now, I am positively certain you and Clarence will have good cause to be glad of this. You will feel more happy, too. Concealment in these matters is 'a worm i' the bud' for a young girl."

Alice had slipped sideways on the floor, and now looked up at Eglinton with shining eyes, joy thrilling her veins, transfiguring her features.

"It all seems so extraordinary. That you should help us! And to think that *he* may get his cavalry commission, after all. You don't know how happy I feel."

"Good-bye. I must go now," answered Eglinton.

Before Alice could collect her wits or had scrambled up, he bent and gave her hand a quick grasp, next strode to the door, utterly forgetful this time of the havoc his boots made among the roseleaves. He was gone.

Alice remained seated on the ground, in a bewilderment that yet was suffused with hope and happiness. "Poor man, poor, dear man! I am sorry for him," she vaguely thought; "though, of course, the idea was perfectly ridiculous. He is so old and shy, and a nobody." Then she felt quite vexed to think she had never even heard a word of his proposal.

"I wonder how he said it. How stupid of me. And Clarence never proposed at all. He just took things for granted."

Outside, Tip was in ambush, and caught Eglinton as he went through the garden.

"Well, did you find Alice? Wasn't she glad to see you, as I said. What's the matter?"

"Matter, eh? I am only looking for your uncle to say good-bye. And the same to you, dear. Don't forget me."

"Are you going? Oh, don't! Why are you going?" lamented Tip, in sharp accents of woe. Then her face puckered hideously, she grew pink, and with a gush of big, real tears, she muttered, choking: "It's too horrid."

Eglinton hurried off in dismay.

Book II.

CHAPTER XVI.

JULY weather—again. Not the same as when last we left Alice seated among roseleaves.

“But all seems so exactly alike in our lives, it is hard to believe that a year has really passed,” said Alice to herself, as she leaned her arms over the fence at the end of the garden.

The Grove meadow stretched down before her into the valley, where a brook gurgled. Since the hay crops the grass was springing again. On the opposite hill slope the woods already wore their deepest green, for August was near. It was a sleepy afternoon, filled with the heat of the long day, and Alice felt unusually languid, even depressed to melancholy, as she rested and gazed at the landscape.

“It is silly to be downhearted like this without any reason,” so she bravely chid herself, then began to sum up how much there was to be thankful for. Take the house, first. Money matters were no bet-

ter, still no worse. Uncle Peter's health certainly seemed weaker, but he refused to coddle; scouted furiously the idea of a doctor. Cousin Charlotte seemed exactly the same that she had been during the last several years—indeed, more youthful since she had paid two more visits than usual in the last twelve months, and at one wealthy cousin's house been given quite a trousseau of half-worn finery, owing to mourning.

Alice herself. "I am not changed," she said, stoutly, under her breath. "The same mind, all the same, even to this old hat of last year that *he* used to laugh at. Ah, well! My own boy. It did seem hard that he should go abroad in June, and that we could not even meet to say good-bye. As he wrote, if his mother had not insisted on having him all the time of his short leave to take her about, he might have run down here one afternoon, and we should have had another meeting in the dear old toolhouse."

"A jolly meeting in the good old toolhouse," were Clarence's exact words, but Alice was fastidious, almost reverent about her love, so shrank from the terms that were doubtless all right for a man, though vulgar for her. How right poor Eglinton had been. For Lord Eaglemont had sent two kindly if brief letters, almost identical, to Alice and her lover. He thanked both for considering him as their confidant, but as Clarence's kinsman stipulated only that all correspondence should cease for a year. Then if the engaged couple were of the same mind still, he would

give his approval to their marriage heartily. And though Clarence, writing in amazement from the Curragh, somewhat upbraided his sweetheart for "letting the cat out of the bag to old Eglinton, who was always interfering," yet, as he added: "Of course we must do as the old boy wishes, darling. It's horrid not to hear from you, still time flies."

"A—lice! You're wanted," came in Tip's most carrying accents from behind. Then that young person appeared, a little lankier, leggier than last year, her red locks plaited in a pigtail instead of flying in a loose mane. Otherwise she was no whit altered, even to her freckles. In a vigorously shouted whisper, she went on from some yards away:

"Tea—in the kitchen. Uncle Peter seemed so grumpy half an hour ago, when he came into the house, that Cousin Charlotte was afraid of a row."

"He is not well, I think, poor old uncle," remarked Alice, in an absent manner, taking the lead to the house. Tip followed her sister along the narrow path between the currant bushes. She always preceded Cousin Charlotte.

Half an hour later, Alice sat sewing dusters and listening with critical ears to her stepsister's monotonous drone concerning the wanderings of *Le Jeune Telemaque*, which was one of the few French books in the library which the young teacher allowed her pupil to read. Naturally they could not afford more modern works from a lending library. The lessons

were given in Alice's "muddle-room," for here Tip could not easily plead interruption to her lessons if the Marchmont girls called. Mrs. Dundas presently put her head in with a timid smile of entreaty, for, no matter what others were doing, she preferred company to loneliness. At that Alice rose mechanically out of the only easy chair in the rather comfortable room and pushed it brusquely to her cousin, stopping a flow of apologetic gestures and ejaculations by a brief "Bosh!" Charlotte gave way gracefully, and retreating with the prize was soon gloating over a penny novelette in the furthest corner. Suddenly Alice ceased hemming and looked up sharply.

"Stop, Tip. What was that noise?"

Nothing loth, Tip left the young Telemachus dissolved in tears, and gaped: "I heard nothing."

"I did. A sound as of something heavy fallen in the study. Uncle Peter is there—still, I'll go and see."

"What nonsense," grumbled Tip. "Well, then, it's only fair for me to read on all the same and get my half-hour of French over."

On she gabbled to herself, impatiently. Alice, meanwhile, uneasy, but ready to smile at her own foolishness, was tapping at the study door.

"Uncle Peter? May I come in?"

No answer. He must be out in the garden. Something might have been knocked down by the cat. Entering briskly, Alice looked about at the

fireplace and tables, where no damage was discernible. Suddenly, a sound from the floor between a snore and a groan made her heart jump, then stand still. Peter Bamfield was lying on the ground, behind the round cupboard table, in a kind of fit.

Ten minutes later and the Fordhurst doctor hurried into the house, hastily summoned by a hatless and breathless little girl. He found the patient still prone, watched with terrified eyes by Mrs. Dundas and old Tozer; while Alice, begging them to keep back for sake of air, was kneeling at her uncle's side. She had loosened his necktie, and was trying to revive him by sprinkling cold water on his forehead. There was no brandy in the house.

Bamfield's eyes opened slightly. He strove to speak, and Alice bent her ear down to his beard:

"Bible cupboard promise."

With difficulty she believed she distinguished these words, uttered with oh! what labor by the poor departing breath. Surely there was a gleam of entreaty in those filming eyes.

"Yes. I promise," she answered loudly in the dying man's ear. Whether he heard or not she could not tell, for he seemed to collapse again; then, what was it——? The doctor, who was now kneeling opposite Alice, and watching, presently drew down Bamfield's eyelids, and said, quietly: "He's gone, my dear."

Gone. All on a sudden, as if it were an everyday thing to do. Everything in the room, the house, the garden looking just as usual. It seemed incredi-

ble. The three women gazed at each other wondering and mute. Then a shuddering little cry came from Amabel, who was trembling in the background. Alice turned and put her arms about the child.

"Come away. Come with me, dear. Doctor—Tozer—Cousin, you'll do what is needful for him; I'll come back when I've seen to my little sister."

Alice did come back soon, and was needed. "For she is just the one pillar of the house. That girl has a good head on her shoulders," said the doctor, in pitying admiration, afterwards.

Late that night The Grove seemed sunk in sleep, save in Alice's room, where she and Mrs. Dundas still sat up, whispering together in the awe that now held them over all the little signs Bamfield had shown lately of failing health, of depression, and so forth; of his last trivial words and doings that summer's day. All at once Charlotte exclaimed, in a more lively tone than quite well suited the occasion:

"Oh, by the way, what was that you promised poor Peter at the last? I am just dying of curiosity."

"Then I can't tell you, for I don't know myself," answered Alice, who felt jarred. "He tried to ask me something, only it was quite unintelligible. But as I thought he said the word 'promise,' I answered just to satisfy him. Oh, dear, dear! When one can be called away so suddenly, why do people leave things till it is too late?"

"I'll say good-night, I think, dear," said Mrs. Dundas, in a sobered voice.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "muddle-room" was like a troubled sea of black stuff and crape, in the middle of which Alice was bending over a table cutting out, and Mrs. Dundas stitching with, for her, quite feverish energy, whilst a sewing machine whirled wheezingly, driven by the stout feet of a village seamstress. All heard the door bell ring; but that these two past days was too frequent to be an event, as before. Immediately after Tip burst into the room, scarlet with eagerness, giving a whispered shriek.

"Alice! Alice! It's Mr. Eglinton. I peeped out under the blind and saw him. May I show him in? What shall I say?"

"How exciting! Oh, Alice, do see him. You really must—or shall I go for you?" uttered Cousin Charlotte, her faded blue eyes opening wide.

Both speakers gazed impatiently at Alice, who looked up, paused, then steadily went on putting pins in the sleeves she had just snipped out. For full half a minute they waited after this till the slow reply came.

"Yes, let him in, Tip. And—if he wishes to see me, I'll come. Open the door *quietly* and don't slam it afterward."

"As if I don't know how to behave," retorted Tip, indignantly, although everyone (including herself in secret) well knew the warning was not unnecessary.

"You look very tired, Miss Bamfield. You are not well, I'm afraid," was Eglinton's regretful greeting, as he held Alice's hand in a friendly clasp a few moments more than are given to an ordinary handshake.

"Oh, there is nothing the matter with me, thanks. Only there has been so much to settle, and I can't always be certain of doing the right thing. There is no one to help, or consult with, but Cousin Charlotte."

"Exactly what I thought; and that is partly why I came down from town to-day. In any case, I should have attended the funeral," was the quiet answer. "I read the announcement in the *Times*."

"That is good of you. Won't you sit down?"

They were in the drawing-room, where Tozer had pulled down all the blinds. Alice glanced round, honestly disliking the doleful impression. Then murmuring, "We may have some fresh air, at least," she set open a glass door into the garden. Instantly the sunlit vista and rose scents made both feel happier.

"You were a real friend to Uncle Peter; indeed,

his only one," went on Alice. "A lawyer from the Spa brought me a letter that uncle left with him last winter, containing directions for me in case of his death, and I am to give you his 'cello."

"I shall value it very greatly. Yes; we were friends. And so are you and I." This was said with meaning, but so deliberately and frankly that Alice did not feel uncomfortable. Eglinton went on, leaning forward with a quiet, business-like air.

"Now, tell me, can I see after these funeral arrangements for you? Also, forgive my bluntness, but at a time of death it is often next to impossible to get at any money until all manner of formalities have been gone through, lasting for weeks. In this case may I be of some help? Will you accept a temporary loan? The thing is usual—between friends."

"Money. Oh, thank you, but I would rather not," answered Alice, in shrinking haste. "Besides, it is extraordinary, but Tozer brought me his purse, and—can you imagine such a thing—he had twenty pounds in it. And when I went to wind up his watch (because he was so particular, I felt as if he would not like it to run down), there, inside the case, was a £10 note. Thirty in all. We may use that for the—the expenses. And in this letter he said he was to have the very simplest burial possible. Are you not surprised that he should have so much ready money?"

"H'm. No; not exactly. He was odd in some ways," observed Eglinton tactfully, with a musing

air. Then, slightly disappointed, "But you three, yourselves? There will be mourning and household expenses."

"The fact is that the first of each month I used to pay *him* so much out of my allowance for Tip and myself, so I shall have that," persisted Alice, resolved on independence.

"Your uncle has left you The Grove, at all events. At least so he told me last summer. You will be rent free; but a house needs keeping up."

Alice, though she had been led to expect this decayed inheritance, looked keenly at the ex-tutor, who was apparently calculating expenses in his mind. What? Had he known that when, last July, he asked her to take him as her husband? Was he weary of poverty and dependence on a rich, capricious friend? Had he reckoned on a rent-free house and enough to scrape along on together? But, even as the ignoble suspicion darkened her mind, Eglinton roused and drew an envelope from his pocket.

"This is a letter from De Lacy. He describes his voyage out and life on board ship most amusingly. And he seems rather in love with Jamaica and his regiment. I thought you might like to see it."

Away fled the shadows from Alice's thoughts; back rushed the healthy, clear brightness. With the slightest lowering of her eyes, but no flush, she simply took the letter, saying: "Thanks." Then

her heart opening, she mentioned some funeral matters that were perplexing.

As eagerly as if accepting an unlooked-for reward, Eglinton offered to take the whole business on his shoulders, and went off at once to see about it. All that day and the next he busied himself, even to the extent of a hurried journey to London and back. Each night he merely made his report: all thought for; all satisfactorily settled. Alice felt a load of care lifted from her mind.

Then came the day of the funeral, when, through a drenching thunder shower, the coffin was carried across the road to the churchyard by the gardener and three other laboring men. Besides these, and some curious children, not a living soul but The Grove household and Eglinton saw Peter Bamfield laid in his grave. Lady Marchmont sent a small wreath, made by her gardener, and a note excusing her husband because of a cold. As Bamfield had been lonely in life, so was he in death.

"What a pity that no one saw how beautifully you lined poor Peter's grave with moss and all those lovely flowers, Alice?" regretted Mrs. Dundas, ingenuously.

"I did it because he loved flowers so," was the simple answer. "It was for his sake, not for anyone else to admire."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"So you have heard the will read? Mrs. Dundas tells me it is as I supposed: The Grove is yours."

Eglinton was the speaker, and it was the second day after the funeral.

"Yes," said Alice, conscious that she should not look pleased. But, honestly, she did so love the old home she could have hugged its trees and kissed the walls for gladness that she and they were not to be parted. "It was a very short will, leaving me just everything he died possessed of. Was not that good of him? The only other legacies are twenty pounds to cousin and ten to Tip to buy mourning, and an annuity of twenty-five pounds to Tozer. She has been crying ever since, because she says she never did him justice; if only she had guessed he had such a feelin' heart she'd not have spoken up so sharp to him as she often did."

"And now——?" queried Eglinton, in a business-like tone.

"Now, I want to thank you for your help. How you kept the expenses so low, I can't think. You have been a real friend indeed," Alice uttered from

her heart, in grateful innocence of the fact that Eglinton had settled quite a third of the items out of his own pocket. She added, shutting her mouth afterwards with a nod of emphasis that was a trick he liked: "Here is your letter back. It *was* good of you to give him that revolver and what he calls the jolly lot of other things; besides speaking for him to Lord Eaglemont."

For imbedded in Clarence's letter, Alice's gloating eyes had found some brief thanks, which were followed by the warm-hearted words: "Mind you stick up for me the same with E. in future, old chap; and if ever I can do twice as much for you, just see if I don't!"

"Oh, that—I forgot," muttered the late tutor, disconcerted. "It was only some rubbish. Besides, I owed it him as my pupil for passing."

"And now you will be going back, I suppose, to—to wherever you have been staying," remarked the girl.

Eglinton hesitated. "Well, my plans are rather vague, and my time is my own. I have been staying in London, but my club is nearly emptied."

"You must think me rather remiss never asking where you have been this last year," murmured Alice, conscience-stricken.

"Not at all. Your mind has been full of this sudden bereavement. Besides, my solitary ramblings would not particularly interest you."

"No matter! It was selfish of me. Are you to

do so much to help us, and are we supposed not to care about your affairs?" returned Alice, with an injured air. The plural was a wise second thought.

Eglinton's eyes wrinkled in a rather sad smile.

"No one could think you selfish who has seen you at home, as I have. But I never care much to talk about myself. Well; is there nothing else then, I can do? Your uncle's lawyer, I suppose, will explain all his affairs."

"He can't. Uncle Peter always said he never went into a lawyer's office as long as he could keep outside. Would you mind just helping me at his bureau? I did open it; but it seemed a ghoulisn thing to do alone, so I shut it up again. . . . He would not like anyone else but yourself, I do believe, to look over his papers and accounts with me."

Alice spoke and looked in pleading eagerness. Sensible, though she was, there was something eerie in the atmosphere of Bamfield's study, still smelling of his strong tobacco, the furniture still pushed aside, as it had been to make room for his coffin. Eglinton understood; aware himself of a disagreeable sensation when alone in that room, as he had happened to find himself lately.

"With pleasure. If you have a spare hour now, why not go at once?" he said, with a deliberate air of willingness that made Alice somehow feel as if the more trouble she gave him, the more grateful was he. So they went into the study, and while Alice opened the ancient bureau, Eglinton without

asking opened two windows. Then they sat, side by side, in front of the flap-lid and began examining the pigeon-holed papers and ledgers.

"I can manage those of The Grove expenses," said Alice. "But would you look at this partition marked 'Jamaica.' Uncle Peter always said that was next door to a dead loss."

For twenty minutes silence reigned, then Alice looked up and found Eglinton gazing at her through his spectacles, awaiting an opportunity to speak.

"Yes. Have you any very bad news for me? Must the sugar estates be sold?"

"Quite the contrary. I find here as clear as daylight that for the last ten years, the Jamaica estates have paid from £620 to £672, pure profit."

"*What?*" Alice fairly jumped in her chair; and next, both she and Eglinton uttered in the same breath: "But what did he do with it?"

"There is more here from The Grove than I understand. Would you mind looking?" went on the girl in a rather shaking voice. "Uncle Peter often said the two farms hardly paid their own repairs. Last winter, when the rain came into Tozer's room here, he assured me he did not know how to afford mending the roof, so ever since we have had just to put a bath to catch the drip. But there seems a £360 odd that puzzles me."

Eglinton turned his attention to the carefully kept books in question, then gravely remarked:

"The same story. This is clear profit also. You

can reckon upon an income of about one thousand a year."

"But—then—Uncle Peter must have been a *miser*," murmured Alice, with cheeks suddenly reddening and rising tears of shame.

"I am afraid he was. Do not let us blame him, for who knows if his mind was not affected by sun-stroke, or fever, so that this was a mania he tried to conceal," answered Eglinton, kindly. But in his heart he was indignant, thinking of the women's lives in this old house which might have been made so much sweeter and happier : of the dead man's own cramped, joyless existence.

Alice was too overwhelmed by the same bitter reflection to rejoice immediately in deliverance from cares of poverty. And Eglinton, seeing this, did not congratulate her. Instead, he went on methodically with his examination, not finding much of interest for some time. Presently he said :

"Now, we have searched all but the secret drawers that should be behind these fluted pilasters in the centre, if this is a properly constructed bureau. Ah! I thought so," for, withdrawing the carved portions, out came two narrow boxes holding papers.

"Now, before attending to these, will you put your hand in—your fingers are so small—and feel for a notch in either of these recesses. Probably there will be only one. Then press it back," said he, eagerly.

Alice tried ; shook her head ; tried again. Presently

she gave an exclamation, and brought out her hand clasped tight full of golden sovereigns. "There are heaps more. I got my fingers deep into quite a large drawer of them. What *could* have made Uncle Peter keep money for like that?" she breathlessly asked, with the stern look coming over her young face that her detractors called unwomanly.

"Very likely just to do as you did; to plunge his fingers into the gold. That is said to give strange delight to persons who hoard money. Well, let us try to think as little of this craze of your uncle's as possible, and remember more his love of music and flowers. Just let us see what these papers are in the boxes, though. . . . Memoranda of wine, merely. . . . Bin No. 3—2 bottles. Bin No. 7—3 bottles. Bins 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8—Hock, Port, etc. . . . Curious! . . . I wonder what is in Bins 3 and 7."

Eglinton was musing aloud, stroking his bushy beard from underneath. Alice listened and watched him.

"Let us go and see," she said, briefly. "Though why should you think it odd to keep notes of the wine?"

"Men who are as methodical as Mr. Barnfield was generally keep a cellar-book," returned Eglinton, nettled. "Why does he not tell us how many bottles are in the other bins?"

Alice found the cellar keys, and lit a candle. Then unlocking a door under the staircase she led the way

down a stone flight of steps to the damp smelling cellars, pausing before another strong looking door with a huge lock.

"Hallo! May I come down, too? I know more about the wine than you do," called Tip from the stairs.

"Come, then," said Alice. "And can you remember which bins Uncle Peter seemed vexed at your wishing to take bottles from?"

Tip peered round into the cobwebbed recesses, then pointed to Nos. 3 and 7. Eglinton and Alice looked at each other meaningly, then examined more closely. The bins were both half full, and labelled respectively "British wines" and "Australian." This was obviously intended to mislead, for the seals showed that the first was Madeira and the second Old Jamaica rum. Having pointed this out, in a voice unconsciously lowered almost to a whisper, Eglinton held the candle close, peering through his glasses. Then he fixed on two bottles in the first bin with seals of a different color, softly withdrew them, observing:

"I thought so. Feel how light these are. No wine in them, but there may be something else."

A similar investigation in Bin 7 resulted in three bottles, seemingly empty, being likewise withdrawn. Tip, who was quickly infected by the gravity of her elders, brought a corkscrew to the study, where Alice and Eglinton had carried up the suspected dusty objects which, held up to the light, already revealed

papers inside them. Drawn out with some difficulty these proved a fresh surprise. Here Peter had his *cache* of all manner of documents that other folk would keep in deed boxes at a bank, or with a lawyer. Investments in rails, mines, gas—all were here. Evidently Peter never disturbed his savings, but hoarded up the interest thereof until enough was gathered for a fresh investment.

Then one more bottle of rum or Madeira was most likely lingeringly emptied in private, and refilled thus. Some twenty-five thousand pounds had been accumulated during many years by the miser.

Tip, who caught this with her sharp intelligence, turned quite pale and kept wonderful silence. Then she hugged Alice abruptly, whispering:

"It makes me feel sick inside. And I put fresh flow—ow—owers on his grave this morning." A gush of tears followed.

"Poor dear! There, do go and help Tozer! Mr. Eglinton is going to dine with us (you will—won't you), and I am so busy. *I trust all to you*," returned Alice, soothingly, but with energy.

And, rising to the importance of the situation, Tip dried her eyes and departed with a brow of care.

"You manage her wisely," observed Eglinton. "Now, there is one thing more. Before giving away your uncle's clothes will you search the linings carefully. Also, he may, indeed, he must—have money hidden away ready for some projected investment. Open the pillow, the mattress in his room: search everywhere. Do you mind doing this yourself?"

"I hate it. But if it must be done, it is best for me to do it." There was disgust in Alice's tone, but steady resolve in her face.

She did search and found notes hidden away, just as Eglinton prophesied; some hundreds of ready money. Afterwards, the old gardener got Peter Bamfield's wardrobe, and scorned it; especially the long-hoarded evening suit, that was riddled by the moth.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE night after the discovery of Peter Bamfield's hidden wealth, it was not surprising that his young heiress did not sleep for some two hours. The overwhelming thought flooding her mind was Clarence—Clarence De Lacy. Now she and he need no longer be parted; need never know want. Dear, kind Mr. Eglinton had roughly reckoned that Uncle Peter's investments yielded about a thousand a year, the estates another thousand; there was ready money besides—and The Grove.

It was riches overwhelming.

Why, how Cousin Charlotte and Tip and Tozer seemed turned that afternoon into female fountains of wonder, congratulations, smiles, and chatter. It was never ending. Yet they did not guess Alice's secret great cause for gladness. Only poor old Eglinton knew that, he who had taken his own refusal last year so well.

Why had he given that strange warning this evening, when he said good-night? For, holding Alice's hand in a rather solemn fashion, he muttered in his

beard: "In all times of our wealth; in the hour of death——" and so went off abruptly.

At last Alice dropped into heavy, dreamless sleep. This lasted till towards dawn, when she suddenly started awake, quaking as if roused from nightmare. Staring into the darkness with distended eyes, the dying scene in the study rose before her mental vision. Again she saw Bamfield's filming gaze, strained her ears to catch that faint, dying request: "*Bible cupboard promise.*" What did it mean? And how could she have overlooked it so unaccountably in spite of the funeral, of the hurry and worries, until now.

Wiping her forehead, that to her surprise was clammy as from fear, Alice half rose, thinking to light a candle and search at once. Stay! Cousin Charlotte, who slept now more lightly than usual in fear of Rintinella's ghost—perhaps of that of Peter, too—might be frightened.

"But I'll go at daylight," said Alice softly aloud, as if assuring someone besides herself, and she found herself wondering why she had done so. Then she fell asleep again, but woke when the sun was just showing over the low, wooded hills, across the dale.

Jumping out of bed, energetically, Alice washed drowsiness out of her eyes with cold water, and, partly dressing herself, stole downstairs in slippers and dressing-gown. The study was so still as she softly entered that a kind of awe came over her. It was almost as if apologizing to unseen tenants

that she drew up the blinds, allowing low level beams, after stealing between the close branches outside, to send shafts of light from the latticed windows across to the glass-fronted old bookcases with cupboards below. Another minute and she unlocked the bureau, found the keys, and with a solemn eagerness went down on her knees to examine the middle cupboard.

There lay the album; a bundle of letters; the massive Bible. On the flyleaf of the latter "William Bamfylde" was written in faded ink. Below, there were entries of his own birth, that of Alice his wife, and their daughter, with the names of other descendants, and some dates of death. Was this all? Sitting on the floor, Alice took the heavy volume on her knee, the sunlight making a golden glory of her hair. As she turned the pages there slipped out a manuscript, written on the large paper used in the eighteenth century for letters. The address on the outside caught her eye. "To the heires of William Bamfylde, sometime owner of The Grove, Kent." Lower down she recognized her Uncle Peter's handwriting in a pencilled note, "Others were before me—others will come after.—P. B."

* * * * *

"Alice! Are you here? Why, you're not dressed! It's nearly breakfast time, and I've been hunting for you everywhere to hook my dress at the back of my neck. And . . . aren't you well?" Tip's questions began loudly and carelessly toned down into

affectionate dismay, as she perceived that her elder sister was seated on the ground, leaning her head against the bookcase, with a stern, white face.

"Eh! All right. I'll be ready soon. I was looking over some papers, and got interested. That's all," said Alice, rather hoarsely, rising.

* * * * *

"Good-morning, Mr. Eglinton. I say, Alice has got one of *her* headaches (she gets real downrighters whenever she has one), and she's going back to bed immediately," announced Tip across the back gate of the garden.

Eglinton, who was smoking in the lane, waiting till it should not seem too early to present himself at The Grove, expressed genuine regret at the news. Then he unguardedly remarked aloud to himself: "Well, I'll be off for a ramble in the woods, the best part of the day then, with some bread and cheese in my pocket——"

Tip gave a cry of longing. "Oh, I should so love to go, too. What do you say? Don't grunt."

"Come along, then, you monkey," sighed Eglinton, who was just discovering that friendship with a child means much self-denial on one side.

After his usual simple dinner that evening the extutor persuaded his retiring inner self that it would be only neighborly to go across and ask if Al—if Miss Barnfield's headache was better. ("She's not Alice to you, so don't get into the habit of calling her so," he sternly told himself.)

As it happened Alice was better, and sitting in the dusk by the cedar tree with Mrs. Dundas.

"Ah! You are the very person I wanted to see, Mr. Eglinton. I have come across some papers of Uncle Peter's, about which I should like to consult you. . . . Then, if you don't mind, will you come now. . . . My head is quite right, Charlotte, thanks; and it will do me good, not harm, to get this off my mind. No, you can't help us, and I won't trouble you with dry business details."

"Dear, dear! It is quite as dull to-day as if Alice had never got a fortune," sighed Mrs. Dundas to herself.

It was so dark in the study that Alice lit the candle on the bureau, which by its solitary presence reminded both of Peter Bamfield. When she asked Eglinton to sit down he looked doubtfully at the arm-chairs, as if he might be dislodging some unseen tenant. Standing upright, Alice briefly recounted her strange night waking and morning search, adding: "Here is the paper. I nearly know it by heart now, so I'll read it over aloud with you, for in parts the writing is crabbed."

Drawing a chair to the bureau, she majestically motioned to her deeply interested counsellor to do likewise.

As the ex-tutor humbly obeyed, he was thrilled by the sense that the girl's golden head was near him, so near he could hardly recall his attention till he heard her voice reading solemnly, in a rich monotone, the

with her son, if she would swear on the cross not to injure my infant daughter, nor interfere with my will or comfort. She did so at once; for having found that Obi followers dread a cross, as of more potent magic than their own, I found it convenient to carry one about my person. This oath I knew she dared not break. But truly she never after showed any desire to do so, being content with her lot.

“Afterwards, being freed together with her son, she remained my faithful servant, so that when, twenty years later, I returned to England with my daughter and bought back the ancestral home of my family, Rintinella would by no means be persuaded to stay behind. Nevertheless, growing old, she pined for her son, to whom I gave the name of John Williamson and left in charge of my estates as overseer. Therefore, she entreated me to return her to Jamaica, whereto I consented but delayed a year, when death, that will not tarry beyond the time appointed, overtook her. Before her end Rintinella asked to speak with me alone, earnestly desiring of me an assurance that the sugar estate called Two Rivers, which had been bought by me with her money, should be left to her son. This she had never hitherto directly asked, nor I proffered. Whilst I pondered, Rintinella continued talking, womanlike, and revealed that although she had promised to give me up her treasure she had kept back the chiefest of all, intending it for herself and her son, as whoso

owned it would be richer even than the Governor of Jamaica. This she had hidden under the great cotton tree at the cross paths between Two Rivers estate and Carnegie Pen, *digging half-way between the tree and the stream, where the latter makes a bend*. This she repeated twice with failing breath, urging that I should deliver the said treasure to her son. She wished that this should take place at night, with a full moon, her son, his children, and relatives being present. Unless this were done she prayed that never might my house, The Grove, pass direct from father to son.

"Now, being angered to think a woman I ever deemed devoted to my interests, body and soul, should thus have played me false by greed, hoarding riches so uselessly, I kept silence not to afflict her with reproaches. And so, before ever I had answered yea or nay, I perceived she was dead.

"Thereafter I had a big mind to do that autumn as Rintinella wished, thinking a winter in Jamaica would warm my blood; also, that after going out to see this treasure with my own eyes I should in due time make it over to my son, John Williamson. But being taken with gout the matter dropped awhile, and another year found me disinclined at my age of ninety for the voyage.

"Nevertheless, as thoughts of Rintinella do torment me at whiles, especially in August, when she died, I write this down for my heires, thereby clearing mine own conscience.

"Let those who come after me in ownership of The Grove deal therefore as seems to them fitting and right.—WILLIAM BAMFYLDE."

Beneath this signature, that was inscribed in characters that wavered yet curved into sudden querks as of a once strong will reasserting itself momentarily, there were some pencilled words which Eglington easily recognized as written by Peter Bamfield. Alice pointed them out, murmuring, "See."

They were: "Where no promise is given, none is broken. If any other owner besides myself found this paper they gave it no heed.—P. B." At another time, apparently, the late owner added: "Some day I hope to go out and see into this. But with next to no money coming from the said estates what would there be to give the Williamsons, unless the treasure can be found, which after the lapse of years is doubtful.—P. B."

The two readers of this old document sat silent for some time in the shadowed old room, dimly lit by its single candle.

Then Alice observed in a determined voice, edged with reproach: "Now, you know as much as I do. I asked you in here to have your opinion."

"As you have made up your own mind already," said Eglington, very quietly, "all I need say is that I feel certain you are going to do what is right."

"I mean to restore the Two Rivers estate to the Williamsons. And also all arrears due at once, if I can afford it—if not, then by degrees. Likewise the treasure."

"Hum. The arrears? Do not be in too great a hurry to be generous; justice generally does well enough."

"We'll see. It seems to me a plain duty to give back what was Rintinella's to her family," replied Alice, doggedly.

A faint sound, like a sigh of relief, seemed to strike her ear; she looked up at Eglinton.

"What was that? Did you say 'Bless you.'"

"I don't think I spoke aloud," replied he, surprised. "But I thought it."

CHAPTER XX.

LONELY! Lonely with that sharp anticipation of worse coming which is more cruel than the aching void when all is over. So William Eglinton felt as he rested both arms on the stone bridge above the shallow, weedy stream.

"Not at home, sir. All our ones is gone to Lady Marchmont's. I'm sittin' thinkin' how empty it will be when they're in Jamaiky," was Tozer's dismally cheerful announcement when he went to The Grove just now. Why should a sane man feel so extraordinarily disappointed? What did a strong, healthy man do here at Fordhurst idling away time? Yet he was useful—to her.

The deep Coombe, with its winding stream among the green hills and slopes, where the cows grazed, was a pastoral before his eyes. Behind, the road clambered steeply under giant hanging beeches to the square-towered church brooding over its clustered village-roofs. But Eglinton only stared fixedly ahead in one direction till voices struck his ears from the road, whereas he had been watching the field path, because she generally——

"Here we are, Mr. Eglinton. Were you waiting for us?" archly hailed Mrs. Dundas, emerging from the trees with Tip.

"Alice is coming through the fields with the Marchmont girls and Dick," snapped Tip. "We were not wanted. Oh, my! You should see them petting and kissing Alice to-day, and asking was it true, she was an heiress? She was just mad, I know, that they had heard; but I never let it out."

"And they were so surprised to hear we were all going out to Jamaica," hastily put in Mrs. Dundas growing guiltily pink. "But, as I told Lady Marchmont, Alice had her sugar estate to inspect, and of course she could not go without me."

"And she would not go without me," exulted Tip, capering. "Look, look! There she is with only Dick. The girls have left them. What fun! Do they think she'll marry him?"

"We know better than that. There is somebody in the West Indies who has got first chance, or I am much mistaken, eh, Mr. Eglinton?" confided Mrs. Dundas, smiling.

The gentleman addressed seemed to bury half his face in his beard, only his eyes looked at the smooth-faced, lanky youth approaching, as if he would dearly like to fling him over the bridge. (And Mrs. Dundas was a kind, simple soul in many ways, but he felt it a pity that somebody could not give her a slap and tell her to stop simpering.)

Up came Alice, walking briskly, and surely her

self-possessed face relaxed and warmed into friendliness as she called out :

"Ah! There is the very person I want to consult. Are you coming our way, Mr. Eglinton?"

And so Dickie Marchmont departed, surprised and inclined to be wrathful, although considering De Lacy's tutor beneath jealousy. It was rumored in the village that Eglinton was trying to get taken on by Miss Bamfield as a kind of agent. "Take care he does not take you in, my dear," Lady Marchmont had warned Alice that very afternoon. But Eglinton strode uphill under the giant beeches, feeling suddenly as light-hearted as a boy; so that even Alice could hardly keep pace with him, till he saw her cheeks glow, and apologized, self-vexed.

"That's all right," replied she, cheerfully. "But will you give me your help with some last business worries before we start for Jamaica?"

"I say, what a pity he doesn't come too. You look glad to help Alice, but sorry we're going," was Tip's parting remark, as she clung to her big friend's elbow, reluctant to let him disappear out of her own inquisitive sight into the study.

Eglinton was an excellent man of business, therefore he soon put everything to rights that Alice laid before him, so that she gladly exclaimed :

"There! It is all ship-shape, and I am truly grateful. I only wish, as Tip says, that you were coming out to Jamaica, too. Then all my troubles with the Williamson's claims would be settled like *magic*."

The words were lightly spoken, the girl little guessing that the man beside her thrilled at hearing them; that his heart beat quicker. She only saw that her companion bent his head short-sightedly over a list of farm repairs she supposed done with; then he said, with hesitating gruffness:

"If I could be of real use out there, there is not much to hinder me going. There is nothing precisely."

"But there is the passage money," retorted Alice, slightly dismayed, vaguely foreseeing possible consequences she had not reckoned with. "I wish—I do wish, you would have allowed me, as I begged, to pay something towards all your stay down here these three weeks. Still, as to Jamaica . . . if you really mean it—we might make some arrangement."

"I don't know that I meant it any more than you did," said Eglinton, looking at her, amused. "But, as I have pointed out already, the time of an idle man is worth nothing except to his conscience. Secondly, one must stay somewhere, so why not at Fordhurst—or in Jamaica. The cost of eating or sleeping is pretty equal anywhere. Thirdly, if I did go out I should only allow one person to pay my passage, and that is Lord Eaglemont. Ah! you look surprised."

"I am surprised. What on earth has he got to do with your going out to help me?"

"Well, not that exactly. But he has been think-

ing of either going out himself, or sending me, to see how Clarence De Lacy is getting on. I'll tell him myself how things stand about your estate, if you like. He will approve, most certainly, of your intentions."

"Old ogre! He may approve of me, now that I have some money of my own. But I don't know that either Clarence or I ought ever to forgive him for forcing us to cease corresponding for a whole year." Alice's eyes sparkled vindictively.

"He meant well. It was some whim of trying the constancy of you young people."

"Oh, if that was all, he might have saved himself the trouble." And Alice laughed under her breath, scornfully. "Thank goodness, soon he will have no excuse for airing his fads upon us any longer."

"But—excuse me, for it is rather distressing to find you so hard upon my best friend—surely Lord Eaglemont used no force," objected Eglinton, thrusting his hand through his hair thoughtfully. "You and Clarence were free to marry without his consent. He believed that probation was wise for you both, and if Clarence followed his benefactor's wishes, Eaglemont offered to continue a purely voluntary allowance."

"Well, that was harsh," persisted Alice, hot in defence of her beloved. "How could we two have married? Clarence told me himself his pay was barely enough to support life for one. Well, my great pleasure in looking forward to meeting Clar-

ence and surprising him with the news of my little income, is that he and I can be independent of your best friend."

Poor Eglinton winced, as if feeling himself included somehow in Alice's denunciation. He shifted his ground, asking in genuine astonishment:

"So you have not written yet to De Lacy? You are going to spring a surprise upon him? Why?"

"Because, according to my best calculations, the year of promised silence will not be up when this week's mail goes. So I may be my own mail," returned Alice, shutting her mouth determinedly. "I never break my word."

"Well done!" exclaimed her companion, emphatically. "If only there were more women in the world like you!" In a flash he recalled his own life with bitterness, was silent a few seconds, then roused, remembering he was asked to give counsel, not confidence. "But about these Williamsons and the Two Rivers estate. It may be far more valuable than the Carnegie Pen, which we will call yours. In that case there may be little or nothing left for you from Jamaica. Then, as you told me lately you were resolved to support Mrs. Dundas and educate your little sister, this will dip into your English income—and Clarence has expensive tastes."

Alice bit her lips hard, she felt near crying, only that she would never give way in public. "Why do you forecast trouble? It is unkind, just when at last I was beginning to feel happy."

"It was merely that I wished you to understand the situation," returned Eglinton, in stolid penitence. "To me, the way out of the difficulty, if there is one, seems clear enough."

"Come! That is more like your good, kind self. And what do you propose?"

"Well, as living in Jamaica is cheap enough, why should not you and Clarence be content like other young couples with married quarters in the camp? Then you can let The Grove for a few years, till you can afford to come home and lead a quiet life here. Unless, of course, that Clarence prefers life in the army. Put Tip to school and get Mrs. Dundas to take her to various watering-places for the holidays."

"Splendid!" cried Alice gaily, jumping up. "That is being a right sort of prophet."

("Am I prophesying smooth things, prophesying deceits, I wonder," thought Eglinton bitterly to himself, as he followed his hostess out of the gloomy study. "If Clarence is what she thinks him, he'll do this. If what I think, he won't. . . . And as to you, you utter ass!"—apostrophizing himself—"what do you mean by wanting to go out with this girl to help her to join her lover. To give yourself any amount of needless pain to a dead certainty, just for the sake of being a little longer in her company. This is worse than love; it is infatuation. Heaven help me! for I can't help myself. I must go.")

Book III.

CHAPTER XXI.

“JAMAICA! Here we actually are, and how lovely it all is, and different to any place I have ever seen even travelling in the South of Europe. Yet—do you know?—all this morning, as I was looking out, while dressing, at the palm-trees, and flowers, and watching the lizards and humming-birds, nothing exactly surprised me. I had the queerest feeling as of knowing all about it, and that old memories somewhere deep, deep down in my mind were being revived.”

So said Alice in joyous confidence, as Eglinton and she stood enjoying the delicious fragrance of the lately rain-washed hotel garden towards eight o'clock. The little party had landed late the previous evening in a tropical rain-squall. Therefore the first impression they received was of palms bowing their leaf-crowned heads, like tree dervishes, in frantic homage to the storm powers; secondly, a

dull wonder that no throbbing, swaying motion was under their feet, although they half fancied it still must be.

"You feel that? Curious! Yet, after all, your ancestors lived here for a considerable while. That may be the explanation, but why I cannot presume to guess," answered Eglinton.

"Ah! You always understand. But don't repeat what I said, please, to anyone else; for I don't care to be laughed at."

Alice spoke in a tone of trusting, intimate friendship. The past fortnight on board ship had brought these two so constantly and closely together, that she now told almost all her thoughts to the reserved, kindly man as a matter of course. More and more she had come to lean upon his sound sense in counsel, his unfailing sympathy, his perfect tact. As William Eglinton never reminded her by word or look of his unfortunate proposal, Alice quite forgot at times that it had ever occurred. At others, she was slightly piqued that he should have got over his refusal so easily. Well! No matter for that. It was a great comfort to have so excellent a friend.

"Surely it must be about time for breakfast," hazarded Eglinton, unwilling to get a certain young friend into trouble, still——

"Yes, indeed. And you like yours at eight. You got into the habit on board ship, I noticed; and how Tip is keeping us waiting. (Of course Charlotte is always late.) I got up before seven, but all was so

quiet in the child's dressing-room I would not disturb her."

"Why, that is like her voice," remarked Eglinton, as a treble cackle sounded from the jungly under-wood.

Next minute, from between banana leaves and bamboo stalks, pushed an orange-red head and a carmine face. Then appeared a torn, scratched, tousled Tip, followed by a grinning, sable boy, whom her eager questions and ruddy charms had decoyed into playing truant from his father's shop.

"I say! I've been out since six and I've been all round and seen heaps of things," screeched the joyous delinquent. "This is Napoleon Peter Jones, an' he's shown me *mongeeses*, an' Johnny Crows, an' he's polished my shoes with those red flowers," pointing to a bed of hibiscus. "Don't they shine? He's got a funny name, but—he's a very nice black boy; aren't you?" this patronizingly.

"Black!" uttered Napoleon Peter, as if unable to believe his ears. Then in outraged scorn: "You'd better know, missie, I's a yellow boy. Yes; dat's so. Black, indeed!—*white trash!*" and turning his back in disgust on his late playmate, the youth stalked away.

"Goodness me! Why, I thought he was as sooty as a chimney sweep," declared the indignant child of the white race; whilst Eglinton quietly shook with rumbling laughter. Alice severely improved the occasion.

"Well, you look as if you had been making mud-pies. Your frock is ruined! And your face and hands are all smeared—with mango juice? No matter—whatever it is, for goodness' sake go and get clean! I am ashamed of Mr. Eglinton seeing you such a spectacle. Besides, you have kept him late for breakfast."

"He doesn't care. He's always kind," burst out the luckless one defiantly, adding in a sudden howl, "But I wish I'd never come to Jamaica if everything is going to turn to misery just when one felt nice and happy." And stamping her foot Tip shook her red mane over her shoulders and marched slowly towards the hotel.

Her sister looked after the rebel with tightening lips, which presently unclosed to utter the stern verdict:

"That child is really getting too bad. What do you say, Mr. Eglinton——? What are you smiling at?"

"At you. Remember you were young once yourself. I am very fond of dear little Tip, so I must take her part this time."

"I was young—once!" Alice's face expressed genuine astonishment. The idea that he—Eglinton—could possibly turn against herself had never before entered her head. She felt unreasonably hurt, and looked it. Her eyes flashed blue lightning, then—though this was quite ridiculous and unlike her—grew misty.

"My dear child, don't be vexed. You must forgive an old friend who finds fault now and again. It's not often—is it?" And still grinning, but with a tender look in his eyes, William Eglinton took hold of Alice's hand and pressed it with a friendly grasp. It was a sun-browned little hand after ship-board life, but so shapely and firm it was a pleasure to keep it clasped. So he did so, repeating, with a gentle squeeze of the taper fingers: "Eh! tell me. Do I find fault often?"

"No. You are always right, too. . . . Here is Charlotte coming."

In haste, surely uncalled for, Alice withdrew her hand, eyeing her cousin, who had come all at once to a standstill and was taking rather ostentatious interest in a wild fig-tree. Aware that Eglinton looked surprised at this nervousness, conscious of the calm kindness and nothing more of his behavior, Alice hurriedly explained:

"Perhaps I was too vexed with Tip. But, you know how much there is on my mind on arriving. It makes one feel upset if little trifles get in the way when there are such big things to consider. All this money to be given people one has to find. Besides——"

"Besides what? When are you expecting Clarence De Lacy, for of course you have sent him word you are here?"

"Yes. I wrote a letter on ship-board and sent it by a black boy as soon as we got to the hotel. There

was no answer last night, so—I suppose it means he is coming himself.”

“Ra—ther! As soon as possible, or sooner, as he would say. By-the-way, did you explain why I came, for my presence may surprise him?”

“I had really no time to explain anything. Oh, there was time enough on board, if you like, but I left this to the last, and then wrote three or four letters, but they had all to be torn up. So in the end I only sent a note.”

“A very good thing, too. Letters are often only the cause of misunderstandings, because nowadays we never do have time to give our minds to writing them. I much prefer telephones. Even then one would like a magic mirror to see if the person at the other end has his tongue in his cheek or not. Come along to breakfast.”

“Do begin without me. I’ll just go and see after Tip. Hi! Charlotte! Are you going to stare all day at that tree?”

Mrs. Dundas, thus addressed, turned with an air of mild surprise. “Oh, there you are. Good-morning to you both. Really, Alice, it is a most wonderful tree; for I have been trying to count how many other plants are growing upon it, ferns and cactussy things. See! in every cranny and on all the branches to the very top, where those flowers are.”

“A tree of hospitality. If we meet with as friendly a reception in the island we shall fare well,” said Eglinton cheerily, leading off the languishing lady at a rapid rate, for he felt famished.

Meanwhile Alice, penitent, sought out her special property, and made up their little quarrel.

"Just think, my pet, that all the people here will be gossiping about me most likely, as the strange owner of the Carnegie estate. And as you and I belong to each other they will judge by appearances, you know. So—there!" And tying a sash with a pull and a pat, Alice ended her homily with a hug.

"I understand—*they will!* Well, you count on me not to disgrace you," replied Tip, profoundly, if suddenly, convinced. "I never thought of that before, but now you'll see, I'll be jolly careful." And she certainly thenceforth did her best to keep her word.

Peace thus restored, Alice enjoyed turtle steak and mud-fish handed along with tea and rolls by tall, black Hebes in well-fitting, pink cotton gowns. Every few minutes she glanced out past the flower-framed windows at each sound of a wheel or horse's tramp. Her eyes were shining with inner, ever growing excitement, her heart was light as air, for Clarence would now be surely coming any moment. She felt as if she loved all the world.

"You lucky girl! I know no one more to be envied," murmured Charlotte, *apropos* of nothing apparently, putting her arm round Alice's waist as, the meal ended, both strolled to the doorway. Eglington and Tip were vieing which could stalk on the stone floor nearest a green-throated lizard that, with contemptuous indifference to humankind, was wait-

ing to pounce on a red wasp, like a jewel, buzzing round the dining-hall. "You have all the world, one may say, and all the men at your feet." This with a playful sigh. Then in a gush of blitheness that would not be restrained, no matter if others were younger, lovelier, more admired: "Well, I do believe the voyage out has given me quite a new lease of life. I feel—oh! ten years younger!"

"H'sh! Listen. What are they saying out on the verandah? I heard our names," whispered Alice. Some of the other hotel guests, late fellow-passengers on board ship, were gossiping in the shade, cheerfully regardless of doors and windows all set open to lure the least breeze indoors.

"What, that Mrs. Dundas? Do you say you liked the old cat? Oh, come, she was far too frisky for her age! Women ought to try and grow old gracefully."

"Well, perhaps she is a case of a matronly sheep wanting to skip like a lamb. Still, she was always smiling and trying her best to be pleasant."

"Very different from the girl. Miss Bamfield seemed to boss the party. She was always domineering over that poor little sister, who was such an imp of mischief. Were you there when one of the gentlemen offered the child sixpence if she would throw raisins into the open mouth of that old, fat Cuban who used to sleep on deck all day? And she said she'd do it for fun, but not for money. The elder came down upon us all like a wolf on the fold,

just as we were having great sport, and by the air with which she carried off the little one you would have thought we were all nobodies and she was a duchess. But how she ran after that very nice man who was with them, Mr. Eglinton. She never let one of us get a chance to speak a word."

"Did not you? What a pity! Oh, he and I had quite some long talks, but, as you say, she evidently had her eye on him. They say she has some little money of her own, so it may be a case. She is rather nice-looking, don't you think?"

"Only a barley-sugar girl, blue eyes and yellow hair. He is far too good for her, money or no money."

Alice, with flaming eyes and cheeks, dragged away her companion in eavesdropping to a reading-room, where nobody read.

"There! Now we've both had the gift Burns wished for everybody, and how do you like it?" she panted with swelling breast.

"The one woman wasn't so bad, but the other is a viper, and I guessed as much, so avoided her, and she's spiteful."

"Why, Charlotte, you are not going to *cry* about such nonsense?"

"No—o! Only it's so unkind," gurgled poor Charlotte with brimming eyes, all her late sprightliness dashed to deep dejection. "You needn't mind, dear, for they're only jealous. But perhaps I—I—did forget my age on board. You see I felt so

happy! And it is such years since I had a good time. Besides, nobody knows till they get on in life how horrid it is to wake up thinking you are still young in the old home with people that lo—ove you (for I was a favorite), and then remember you are nearly fifty, with nothing to look forward to but perhaps being more lonely. . . . Oh, there, forgive me, darling! It's too bad of me to be spoiling your first day in this lovely place?" And with a great effort Mrs. Dundas steadied her trembling lips and feebly laughed.

Alice rewarded the shallow but sweet soul with a great hug.

"That's right. Don't give those women the satisfaction of showing you mind. As to me, they'll very soon see their mistake. Running after dear old Eggie! I must tell Clarence that; he will laugh. He ought to be here soon." And she looked for the hundredth time that morning out of doors impatiently; whilst Mrs. Dundas looked at her furtively, with a searching, puzzled air.

Two hours later, as Eglinton was busily writing his diary, Miss Bamfield approached him with determination, scorning the covert smiles of her late detractors, who were sunk in easy-chairs on the verandah, and had vainly tried to lure the writer into a social morning chat.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, but—do you *think* anything can be the matter? I mean," with an effort, "Clarence hasn't come yet, and he may be ill."

"He may, but he is much more likely to be on

parade, or kept by some duty in barracks unexpectedly. Let's see the time. What—getting on for eleven? How the morning has slipped by. If he has been delayed till now, he will most likely wait till the cool of the evening."

"*Wait!* I have been waiting hours already. He would never keep me waiting all day. That is quite a ridiculous idea of yours. No; he must be ill or he would at least have sent a message."

Eglinton looked up at the troubled eyes that were staring out at the sun-baked drive and vista of hot road between mango trees. He rose quietly.

"In any case, I'll just drive over and see. Don't worry. He may have no one handy to send. Hallo!" (to the lolling black driver of a waiting buggy in the shade) "You engaged? No. All right." A minute later and Cupid's stalwart messenger was lost to sight, whilst Alice, gazing after the hooded little vehicle that hid him, murmured graciously: "Well! you are an old angel!"

"Have you sent your friend off on your errands in the full heat—poor man?" queried one of the gossiping ladies, while both smiled.

"Yes," returned Alice, briefly, "I did."

"Ah! wait till he is married. A man is never so ready to fetch and carry for his wife." To the waggish hint, which evoked sly smiles from both the cronies, Miss Bamfield lightly answered with cool amusement:

"You see, I don't wait till he is married. That period is most likely considerably remote."

CHAPTER XXII.

"WELL?" queried Alice, three-quarters of an hour later, tripping down the grilling steps to meet Eglinton returned—shamelessly indifferent to whatever spectators might say.

"Well! He's all right; quite well. Only gone up to the mountains and staying with some people, Fitzwilliams, I think, was the name, for a hop, the white regiment up there at Newcastle is giving. He has not got your letter yet."

"Staying up in the hills for a hop!" This was uttered slowly, in the bitterness of extreme disappointment. "Well, of course, he does not exactly know we are here; but in his place some instinct would certainly tell me not to leave."

"How unreasonable you women are, even the best," smiled Eglinton, in a fatherly fashion. "Come! I must take his part in this, poor chap. He'll most likely ride down late this evening. Meantime, what do you say to driving out to inspect your own place, Carnegie Pen, this afternoon? I was asking my driver questions, and he says it is not too far."

"I don't care what we do; just what all the rest of you like," quoth Alice, turning sharply to her own room to battle with unshed tears. Like her little sister—like Mrs. Dundas—she felt it too hard that "things should turn to misery," as Tip lamented, "just when one felt so nice and happy."

* * * * *

"Come! This is much better fun than frizzling in Kingston street this afternoon, or frowsting in the hotel," said Eglinton, in a tone of satisfaction, as he touched up a wiry nag in the buggy-shafts and took a glance at the girl sitting beside him. Then, divining a secret objection in his companion's mind and giving a good-humored laugh: "Of course, you would rather have inspected your Jamaican home for the first time with your future companion for life. That goes without saying. Still, you could hardly have been devoting yourself to Clarence and at the same time talking business to your agent, this Williamson. So we can get through the stern arithmetic part this time, and you and he can do the—*the*—morning round next visit, eh?"

Alice felt she would have been furious had he said "spooning." But mercifully her good friend, she reflected, was gifted with that most blessed gift for daily use—tact. Therefore her answering inquiry came in an obedient tone:

"Are we—am I, that is—not to say anything about old Rintinella and the money to-day then?"

"H'm. Not in too great a hurry, I should say.

To begin with, there may be a whole crowd of heirs to find. Next, it will be three weeks before full moon, the time fixed for digging up the treasure. So the same date would be best for restoring the canefields."

"No doubt you are right," assented Alice, tractably. There is nothing very exhilarating in the prospect of paying over money to other people which you could spend, oh, how enjoyably, yourself! But presently she roused to explain, looking round with ever growing admiration as they bowled at a smart pace away from Kingston and out on the Liguanea plain stretching towards the Blue Mountains, "How English this looks!" The grass-edged road was excellent, its green logwood hedges were not unlike hawthorn, although here and there came serried rows of prickly pears like soldiers on parade, or aloes. They passed many villas with English names painted on the gates, and at cross-roads under spreading trees were clustered houses as neat and resembling an English hamlet as could be, save that the groups of playing children were more or less dark-skinned.

"It is really homelike. Look at those sunlit green hills rising so suddenly, as in our lake country," answered Eglinton, with the full fellow-feeling which makes of a companion a comrade. "Hallo! Here is a good park, and what a lot of young horses." Just then came a shout from the dark Jehu who was driving Mrs. Dundas and Tip in a larger buggy behind.

“Dat Carnegie Pen, sah. Yes. Will you get down, sah, and open de gate?”

But at this cool request Tip saved her friend's dignity by an indignant screech, and springing up she grasped the reins and poked Jehu so vigorously in the back, admonishing him as a lazy, big thing, that good-humoredly amused, he descended.

The drive wound through a flat pasture studded with heavy-headed mango trees and past a brown pond. They drew up before a wide white house, with horse-shoe steps leading to a broad and shady verandah in front of the second story. Around the entrance were massed tamarind trees and the glorious flame-flowered acacias, besides the rose and yellow kind, whilst a blaze of flowers edged the shrubbery; double hibiscus, frangipani bushes, and oleanders, not forgetting vines and creepers that had climbed to the very summit of the trees to hang out their flaunting pennons of coral or lilac blossom.

“I'll ring. Tip, come up with me,” cried out Alice, eager as a child to be the first of the party to mount her own steps. Tip, perfectly understanding, tumbled out of the other buggy in frantic haste, and hand in hand they two went up the time-worn steps, and took a furtive peep at a cool, stone-flagged hall beyond the open door.

A trim, black butler answered their ring and showed the whites of his eyes on hearing Mr. Williamson inquired for. Then he grinned widely, and volubly explained he knew no one of that name. The

present master in this house was Captain Blower, "who hab leased de same from de original owner, Missus Wright, who now lives up in de hills wid husband and family. Yes, missie; dat so."

The little party, now all clustered round the door, gazed at each other bewildered. The butler relieved the tension by a sudden guffaw and shout of, "Massa, hi, sah! Some ladies come to pay a call on an unknown pusson." There came a deeper toned answering shout from the shrubbery:

"What, eh, ladies? Ladies always welcome. Ask them to walk in kindly, Martin. I'll give 'em their bearings with pleasure." Turning, the visitors saw a squat, thick-set man, whose red-tanned face was framed in bushy white hair and beard, crossing the gravel in ponderous haste.

"Why, Blower, how are you, captain? This is a surprise," called Eglinton in cordial greeting.

"Bless my soul! Is that you, my lord. How is your lordship's noble self?"

"Come, stow that, Blowhard, and call me plain William Eglinton. My friends here don't know all the names you and I used to give each other when we were alone in your cabin."

"Ho, ho, ho! Plain William, then, give us your fist. You're a real tip-topper, sir, anyhow."

As Eglinton clattered down the steps with outstretched hand, the captain met him with heartiest warmth, and both sawed the air for quite half a minute, and growled friendly-like in their beards, as

Tip afterwards described the meeting. Straining her ears that precocious person could distinguish, "Same old game, sir, what, eh? Still fooling round the world?"

"That's it, captain. A rolling stone. I've no—one to settle down for?"

"Bless my heart, man; no more have I. Yet here I am."

A few more of these brief muttered confidences, then both men came up the steps. Eglinton, after mutual introductions, began to explain the object of their visit. But the captain would not listen till he had hospitably bustled his visitors through the hall, into a further saloon furnished with deep cane chairs and lounges, and deliciously dark and cool after the heat and glare outside.

"Mistake or no mistake, it's an ill wind—you all know. And I love ladies' visits. Tea, Martin, and bustle up the cook to give us hot cassava cakes for this young lady," bowing to Tip. Then with jovial admiration, "I say, she is a real beauty! or you will be, my dear, in a year or two. What, eh? Give me that colored hair for a warm heart and a high spirit. Real auburn—sweet auburn. My own was something of the same before it turned to tow, only in a man's stubble there are not those lovely warm shades and ripples."

The object of this praise glowered distrustfully at first, but seeing the captain spoke in good faith her small, freckled face soon rippled with elfish smiles.

Thereupon the good-natured old sailor, who loved children, patted her shoulder with a mighty paw; then turning to Mrs. Dundas with breezy politeness:

"And now, madam, to business *and* pleasure."

"H'm. Let me bring this young lady to your notice, Blower," intervened Eglinton, as Alice sat in smiling chagrin, amused at herself for feeling slightly snubbed. "Her name in full is, I believe, Miss Alice Carnegie Bamfield; and she has just arrived from England in this party. Does that convey nothing to your mind?"

"The devil a thing, as the Irishman said when he landed on a desert island and looked for his week's washing on Saturday."

"Well, but—By Jove! That picture should. Look! look, all of you."

And jumping up in unusual excitement Eglinton pointed to a large portrait above the fireplace. Their eyes now used to the gloom, exclamations of surprise burst from the others. "It's Alice! . . . What an extraordinary likeness. . . . How strange!"

"It *is* like me, is it not? Can that have been my ancestress, Alice Carnegie?"

They were looking at a picture, apparently painted in the early part of the last century. It represented a young girl in a grey plumed hat and ruffled dove-colored gown, cut low to display a beautiful neck. Her golden hair was puffed out in bewildering profusion, ending in heavy curls on the lovely bosom,

but the face itself, open, laughing blue eyes, broad brow, clear cut, firm mouth, was exactly like that of the girl who stood below.

"An Alice Carnegie it was, sure enough. She was an heiress who married an English rebel. So my landlord, Wright, told me; and his wife was born here," explained the captain. "Not, I believe, that Mrs. Wright is the real owner of Carnegie Pen; though as her grandfather got a ninety-nine years' lease of it, she feels kind of at home. The veritable Johnny this place belongs to is one Williamson. Are you an English relation of his, miss?"

"He is my agent. I am the last descendant of the Carnegie and Bamfield families," returned Alice stiffly.

Captain Blower looked mystified, but entrenched himself in downrightly uttered and indisputable remarks:

"A good chap, Williamson, mind you, though he is a bit brown; and a tidy little villa he has over yonder on his Two Rivers estate, where he lives with his mother. Besides, he's got a real nice country place across the island near Moneague."

"And how came you here, my dear Blower? Under which landlord of this apparently much-owned house?" asked Eglinton, who was listening keenly.

"Which? Why the Wrights, of course. They sublet it to me for the remainder of their lease, which began and ends with this nineteenth century.

Then as we are now in '94 and that I'm pretty tough yet, and good, maybe, for a look in at the twentieth century, we fixed it up with Joe Williamson to lease the Pen on to me for my life. It's a goodish rent; still there's not a place to beat it all round here unless King's House itself (that's where the Governor hangs out)."

"But this is a downright shame. Where do I come in?" exclaimed Alice, with a sudden passion that lit her up, so that all the others looked at her in admiration and old Blower in amazement also. "Why, I am the owner—I—I! What right had these people, and this Williamson, to lease you my house without my leave, or" (correcting herself) "without my Uncle Peter's leave before he died? That's the question."

Eglinton sketched the situation briefly, premising that as Captain Blower and he were old friends, what now passed should be considered as said in confidence.

"Whe-e-ew! Here is a pretty kettle of fish." The captain whistled softly, then gazed at Alice and Eglinton, who returned the compliment. Slapping his knee, the worthy seaman decided: "Well, anyway, where there's good will mutually amongst this present crew, we will find the best way out of this scrimmage for you, Miss Alice Carnegie Bamfield. You trust Benjamin Blower to hold his tongue till a jawbation is wanted. And then, Lord sakes! you tell me to be your spokesman, and I'll give it for

you—hot and strong. Don't worry! You've got a friend in my lord, there—excuse my joke, Mr. Eglinton—who is one of the best I ever met with in life, and I've come across a goodish few."

"But why do you call him my lord?" piped Tip, with her usual curiosity.

"Because he's one of Nature's noblemen, my dear, and so I must say even to his face. There, the murder is out! I've known him for some years—well. And I'm proud to say it."

At this moment a butler entered bearing the tea equipage, with which was a dish resembling hot crumpets that he placed on a low stand beside Tip, with a wide, ingratiating smile. His presence broke up the general tension.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Now then, let's all be hobnobby," urged Captain Blower, urging forward the heavy chair in which he sat, by violent spurts. "And may I request this *most* elegant lady, Mrs. Dundas (have I got the title right?), to honor me by presiding over the teapot. My good friend, plain William, will look after the wants of a certain damsel, who is far from plain. And me and the little 'un will enjoy our two selves, you bet, if we get our share of what's good that's going. Eh, little Miss Sumner? How's the cassava stuff?"

"Delicious," mumbled the recipient of a friendly nudge from the host, her mouth full of toasted and buttered wafer. "It's so nice an' crumbly, I could eat the lot."

"Martin, more cassava cakes. Two more plates, d'ye hear. Tell Clementina, or is it Melaikoia (I always mix up the maids' names), to be a good girl and look nippy to please *ME*," roared the captain. Then he imparted to the visitors, with his tongue in his cheek: "Mustn't offend the *lady*, or she'll get in a huff and off it. But, bless 'em, these niggers love a bit of chaff, and we get along together first rate."

During tea, Miss Bamfield held a murmured counsel with her prime minister, and it was agreed that the best solicitor in Kingston should be engaged, and Mr. John Williamson brought sternly to account for misappropriation. Meantime, Captain Blower was flirting, after a boisterous fashion, to his heart's content, dividing his attentions between Tip, who returned them to the full in kind, and Mrs. Dundas, who accepted them with inward glee, outwardly tempered to gentle gaiety by chastening remembrance of the horrid verdict upon her conduct overheard that morning.

"And now, does the fair owner not want to cast an eye round her inheritance?" demanded the captain, with kindly consideration. "Aha! Mr. Eglington, you're looking at your watch—always prudent and punctual you were and are. Well, it's true that darkness drops down upon this island to a given minute. No philandering twilights here, Mrs. Dundas, for young people like you to steele round with a somebody that's sympathetic. But the buggies have lamps. Stop and take pot-luck with the old interloper. What, eh?"

This hospitable wish was however declined by Alice and Eglington as leaders of the party, who, with warm thanks, felt they must not risk embroiling their entertainer in difficulties with his kitchen queen.

"You will permit me to come early one morning perhaps, and go round the estate in the cool with—

well, it would be best if Mr. Eglinton would accompany me kindly. He has been my late uncle's friend and my adviser," requested Alice, rather grandiosely. But, then, she felt it discreet to explain in what capacity Eglinton was at her right hand, lest—lest people should go on imagining silly nonsense.

"Lady, fairest of the fair, this is your house, and I'm your humble servant," was the jovial reply. "Now, look ye here. In your place I'd like to poke my nose into every hole and corner of my own mansion this blessed minute. Not being shown it off by strangers. Except, I may repeat for your information what Mrs. Wright told me, that every stick of this old furniture was here when her grandfather entered the house, and right good care has been taken of it. Probably the old planters, your ancestors, used to sit in that very seat of injustice," pointing to a vast armchair of Spanish stamped leather and mahogany, with a broad, wooden head-piece like a sideboard top.

"Yes, yes; you go round by yourself—or with my good friend, William, there, and conjure up romantic visions of the past and similar moonshine, comfortably."

"Oh, thank you! I call that truly thoughtful. But, Tip, you must come, too," answered Alice, in fervent pleasure. She took Eglinton's consent for granted, he inwardly noticed, not certain whether to feel glad or sheepish.

So they three wandered hesitatingly through the

old planters' home, their steps echoing on bare polished floors, their eyes resting curiously on the ancient cane-seated sofas and chairs in the sitting-rooms, and the mahogany four-posters in the bedrooms, which opened out of the central apartments. There were three halls in succession, through which blew a welcome wind, the famous Jamaican "Doctor," from hall door to back door. At the latter Alice stood entranced by a lovely view over green tamarind tree-tops to green hills. Far up, between a mist-wreath and a sky-peak, lay Newcastle camp, like a flock of sheep white on the hillside. She sighed low, looking thither. And one of her companions heard and echoed her sigh in his heart.

Tip was equally charmed with the stableyard below the steps, and indeed it was picturesque. To right were kitchens, where smiling black servants went to and fro; while tidy stables filled two more sides of the square. In the midst grew crotons, yellow alamandas, and red and white caladiums, of which legend tells that it grew beneath the Cross and thus was spotted with holy blood. Everywhere the bongainvillea trailed its purple mantle, and a grape-fruit tree had climbed to the house-roof. As the sightseers presently returned, even Tip silenced, she knew not why, they could not but hear Charlotte's accents:

"No, indeed! Hotel life and its society has little charm for me. You are quite wrong in your guess as to my character."

"What! Are you domestic, then? I could have sworn you loved to shine."

"What a flatterer! You are so agreeable that our hotel acquaintances will seem terribly dull to-night. You quite soften the blow of finding Carnegie Pen occupied. My cousin and we all counted on our staying in her own house—Ah! there you are, Alice!"

"And why on earth should not you all stay in Miss Bamfield's house. What, eh?" bellowed Captain Blower, suddenly fired by a splendid idea, and striking his knee: "There are three rooms awaiting you three ladies, and a right good attic up the stair, if my friend here won't object to roosting. Come—come, I'll take no refusal. You all four come out to-morrow and stay for a month *at least*, or longer, if you like. I'll send over a cart for your baggage and some ponies for the young ladies and this old pal of mine. And I'll drive Mrs. Dundas back in my own buggy, if she'll trust herself to my care."

He eyed each of the group questioningly. Charlotte beamed like a westering sun upon him. Tip pranced in ecstasy, open-mouthed. Eglinton was watching Alice, who hesitated, but looked greatly pleased. Then in an impulse of gratitude she burst out:

"Really, you must be the very kindest of men. I should love to come. Why should not we?" turning appealingly to Eglinton, who, however, would only answer with an inscrutable smile. So it was settled.

As they rattled down the curving drive and into the road, Alice reproached her mentor with slight pique:

"Tell me, was it wise to accept? You might have given your advice."

"I wanted to see how you would decide for yourself. And you did the right thing, in my opinion. You will be inside your own house, and dear old Blower will help you to his utmost. He was captain on an Eastern liner for years, and many a voyage to and fro I have had in his ship. That is how we became friends."

Before they could get back to the hotel, darkness swiftly enwrapped the plain lying between the lights of Kingston and the looming darker hills. So Eglington pulled up, and got out to light the buggy lamps. One already illumined one side of the pleasant lane, and he was busied with the second, when there came the soft thud of horses cantering on the grass edge. In the stillness Alice distinctly heard a well-known voice that made every nerve in her body jump. In eager pleading came the words, nearing her with each bound of the horses:

"Yes, yes; do allow me. I must!—I have set my whole heart upon it."

"No, no, young man. You must keep your proper place."

The answer rang out in a woman's voice, clear and mocking. At the same moment two riders passed at a quick pace out of the gloom across the

shaft of light and were lost once more in the shadows.

Only a moment or so. And Alice had arrested a glad cry on her lips. For even as she recognized Clarence De Lacy, although he was turned from her, bending sideways, the hungered eyes devouring that youthful, easy outline took in a jealous impression of this other. She of whom he was craving favor. A tall figure with singularly graceful seat and fine carriage. A dark-eyed face framed in dusky fluffiness. Was the girl handsome? Surely; or Clarence would not trouble himself to bend so towards her. Alice knew him too well! And the unknown girl seemed well-mounted, too, her horse was going so well under her. De Lacy had only a pony, so perforce looked upwards in pleading.

A hallo! from Eglinton was unheeded by the riders. Climbing back into his seat, he exclaimed, puzzled:

"I say, was not that Clarence? It looked so like him I gave a hail. Did you see?"

"I did. It was he."

"Why did you not call out, then? He might have heard you."

"He might. But he was not alone," dryly. Then in a calm voice, despite her inner disturbance: "It does not matter. He will most likely come over to see us soon."

"You may bet on that safely," replied her counsellor in so confidently cheery a tone, that Alice

silently felt somewhat comforted for a while. Comforted, yes! But then she began to wonder what hidden cause there should be to feel discomforted. And thus looking within, the consciousness of foolish fretting vexed her once more.

Dinner time came and passed at the hotel. Alice with red spots on her cheek furtively watched the door. She heard, without appearing to notice, how Eglinton requested in confidential undertones of the head waitress that a spare place might be left beside their chairs, as a friend might drop in. Seemingly by accident he himself left the seat next to Alice vacant, although heretofore he had taken it as a matter of course.

And his reward was—that Miss Bamfield wished to herself the good man would not be so needlessly officious. He was drawing the attention of everyone to the evident fact that someone was expected—who did not come. Possibly there was a chuckle in the mind of the rejected suitor as the half hours sped, vacant of Clarence's sunny face and joyous laugh. Yet, no! Oh no! What demon of unkindness must have crept its way, snakelike, into Alice's heart this evening; that heart whose portals had been so happily wide-set this morning. Out, out! ungrateful reptile! No mean suspicion should harbor therein an instant longer. William Eglinton was the most simple-minded and unselfish of men. He was incapable of rejoicing over Alice's disappointment.

Besides, as to himself he plainly no longer cared!

Nevertheless, in spite of Alice's self upbraiding and that Eglinton's conscience assured him of his own good intentions, that individual could not think why he was scurvily treated in talk, or even mere answers, by the lady of his heart that evening. ("Most women are unaccountable, but she is so different to them all," he argued to himself. "It can't be because De Lacy was riding with another girl. That would be silly. And it need not be because he hasn't turned up to-night. I've told her that mess dinners are often late affairs—there is a guest night on perhaps. Very likely, however, she is conjuring up trouble ahead with Williamson. Yes, that must be it. She might trust me to set it right.")

He thought it queer also why Mrs. Dundas, of all persons, begged that when sitting outside afterwards, they should put the width of the hotel garden between the small party and their late ship-board acquaintances. As Eglinton smoked and the womankind sat by him in the darkness, the night air was deliciously fragrant after the heavy rains that had lately fallen. There came strange noises from the underwood of frogs and crickets that seemed everlastingly, as Alice roused herself to say, "snicking out garments with big scissors at a mothers' meeting."

All at once a small flame flashed close by out of a thicket of banana and bamboo and sailed past them, diffusing a soft green radiance.

"There, see your first firefly," said Eglinton to Alice, near him, adding lower: "Often, when I have been lonely in my past life one of those little lamp-bearers has given me new courage. Light in the darkness—suggesting hope."

"Thank you," breathed Alice, in distinctly grateful though hardly audible reply.

Now why? William Eglinton asked himself what there was to thank him for, and mused vainly thereon as he smoked.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEXT morning, after breakfast, Alice sternly forbade herself to watch the drive and the high road. This self-denial was supported by the presence of the ship-gossips on the verandah by the front door, whence they watched "the gentlemen," as they termed their husbands, depart on business, bound towards Kingston.

So Miss Bamfield was alone in the reading-room, with some English fashion papers, months old, pretending to herself she was not waiting; only watching those tiny darling humming-birds so tame, some lit now and again on the corallinas close by Alice's head. Perhaps this last appeared to be a golden curiosity thrust out, as it was, of window, careless of sunshine, and steadily admiring all the sights close by of insect, tree, bird, or flower. One white-breasted fellow, with a green back, iridescent beyond imagination, ceased whirring over an arbutilon honey-cup and hopped from tendril to bud, eyeing the stranger with impudent fearlessness, as who should say, "Who are you, pretending to be careless, whilst I espy shadows in the background of your blue

eyes. Twit, whit, now I am most important, though small, with myself and consort and nest and eggs all protected by Government."

Whisk! Bang! Someone entered the room and shut the door behind. A quick step, the clatter of spurs. Withdrawing her head, Alice found herself caught in a close embrace, her hair ruffled under eager fingers, her face imprinted with hot kisses. Only after some minutes Clarence De Lacy, for he it was, of course, loosening his hold, held his sweet-heart at arm's length with a criticising air.

"Now then! Let us look at each other. How sunburned you are!"

"That is from the voyage, it was so delicious to sit basking in the sunshine on deck."

This penitent excuse was the first greeting uttered by Alice Bamfield to her affianced lover. What a hundred very different first words she had dreamed of in absence! At the same time, she herself was taking in every line of the beloved face not beheld for a year.

Then her mouth curved into a smile, meant to conceal faint regret.

"You are altered, too, if I am brown. You look somehow—well, I suppose it is more manly. No doubt because of your new duties and cares as a soldier."

(This in haste, as a slight crease frowned on Clarence's forehead, that only showed its old white velvet in a triangular patch.)

"That's all right. We are hardworked, I can tell you, from morning to night, under this general. I was in such a hurry to come out after parade that I did not even take the time to get out of my uniform, see! How do you like me in it?"

With a smile of conscious vanity, Clarence stood to be admired. What a mere dear boy he was after all! thought his love with a fond indulgent laugh in her heart. Then, understanding what was plainly her duty, more or less gravely, she gave her meed of praise. No one being by, both might and did indulge in lover's lisped babble.

"Now, come and have a good talk," commanded Clarence, suddenly, sitting down and trying to draw his love on his knee.

But Alice, unused to such endearments, stoutly resisted, horrified lest any of the hotel-guests might enter at any moment.

"No, no. . . . Please think of what people might say of me. . . . There! I will bring this chair very near; quite near."

"Who cares what people say?" grumbled De Lacy, displeased. Thereupon, forced to be at a distance whence, as all the world knows, one can descry imperfections not to be noticed when cheek to cheek, in a reproving tone: "While I think of it, don't call yourself *brown* here in Jamaica. It doesn't do. You don't look as if you had a drop of—of dark blood in your veins, so no use making people think you might."

"But you know I haven't!! What a horrible idea! At least if you don't know, you can consult my family genealogy, and in fact I beg that you will do so."

"So ho, whoa! Don't flare up at me. There is nothing horrible about it. Lots of people here, have, let me tell you, in the very best set," was the would-be soothing reply. But as Alice did not look as instantly appeased as he deemed she ought, De Lacy with quick strategy turned the war into the enemy's country. Wrinkling his forehead magisterially, and betraying a genuine slight annoyance in his voice, he began:

"And now—what brought about this queer start? I mean, why did you come out to Jamaica without writing beforehand? Next," failing apparently to be thoroughly convinced that Alice's explanations were sufficient:

"What! Your promise to Eaglemont not to correspond for a whole year was not expired? Oh, he be blowed! And coming out with old Eglinton, too. Why the dickens does he want to poke his nose any longer into my affairs. It did make me feel rather savage last night when I found your note in my rooms. . . . There, darling, don't look hurt. You know well enough it makes me very happy to see you, your own dear self. But it would rile any chap to have his old tutor turning up in this prying fashion. I know jolly well, Eaglemont has paid Eggy's way out, as a spy on the heir."

With some ardor and much earnestness, Alice took up arms for the absent, and combatted De Lacy's suspicions. Clarence, it must be said, seldom nursed grudge or grievance, and his happy vanity helped forgiveness of his late mentor.

"Certainly, he was always really fond of me, poor old Eggy. Of that I am cocksure. But he must not begin boring me again with his fatherly advice and lectures on what he calls my natural extravagance."

Thus the stream of talk diverted from danger of rocky channels Clarence went on smoothly, his thoughts flowing through a level plain:

"Well, and what did Uncle Peter leave you, as well as the house? (Eglinton wrote me word of that besides telling about the death. He said you felt bound to Eaglemont not to write, so he thought I would be interested in the news. Very decent of him.) There was not much oof, eh? I never thought there would be, judging by the wretched way the old fellow lived.

" Jumping Jehoshaphat! Some hundreds a year! Hooray! Only you must educate Tip and support Mrs. Dundas for life out of that. My dear girl, dash it all! there is no must about it. Duty! I'm as great a stickler as anyone for duty" (this severely said), "but one need not be ridiculously quixotic WHAT! Do you mean to say you have actually taken this voyage in order to hand over a large portion of the sugar estate to a lot of old Bamfylde's octoroon descendants? My

heavens! You can't be in your sober senses! Why, Alice, you must be stark, staring mad!"

Often before in life had Alice known what a powerful influence money can be on the minds and behavior of even our nearest and dearest. But till now she had never fully realized this in all its bitterness. Clarence was indignant at first, as with a fool. His mocking contempt of her "sentimentality" stung Alice into taking up the position that, although young, she had long tenaciously held of being free to manage her own affairs. Furious at his veto on her generosity being firmly set aside, De Lacy lost his temper and stigmatized the unshaken resolve of his heart's mistress as sheer obstinacy. Next—and hardest to bear—he lapsed into the cold do-as-you-please tone of the injured whose complaints have fallen on deaf ears.

Half an hour—an hour—passed by in fruitless argument. Alice, pale and exhausted by the disappointment of meeting blame where she had joyfully looked for praise, and disagreement instead of fond support, sat silent and sorehearted, her eyes dim and her lips tightly pressed. Thus one of the ship-gossips found them, when, urged by curiosity, she came in to turn over the papers and withdraw with information of what was "going on." This broke up the interview.

Clarence sighed and drew his hand across a brow that at will he could quickly furrow in waves which passed, leaving no trace.

"Well, well, wilful woman must have her way, I suppose. Without wishing to be rude, remember what Solomon said about an unwise person and his money being easily parted."

And Lieutenant De Lacy smiled the sad smile of a world-weary philosopher; adding in mild surprise, nevertheless: "What beats me is that Eglinton, of all men, instead of preaching prudence, now that he seems to have edged himself into the place of factotum to you in the same way as he has got hold of Eaglemont's ear—what passes my comprehension, I say, is that he apparently urges you on to squander your fortune on a set of niggers who won't say 'Thank you.' Ungrateful brutes! I've seen this Williamson, he's as brown as a walnut, and once he gets the land from you he'll swagger worse than ever."

"Mr. Eglinton did not urge me in the least. It was my own thought and act: what I promised Uncle Peter when he was dying. I have been my own mistress in the whole matter."

"That you always were ever since I have known you," mourned Clarence, shaking his head, dolefully. Next, rising with resignation and affecting to yawn: "Well! it seems about time I should pay my respects to the others of your party, or they will think our confabulation mysterious. By Jove! however, Eglinton has winded our secret. Do the others, eh? Tip has smelt a rat, I'll bet."

"She is a child; of course I would not take her

into my confidence. Cousin Charlotte only knows there is an understanding between you and me. But, as we are on the subject," Alice spoke with heightened color, forcing out the reluctant question: "Do you wish our engagement known now, or not?"

Next instant she regretted the ill-timed words. Clarence folded his arms and contemplated the sky for some time in painful silence. At last—at last his reply came in the choked tone of one aware that he has borne himself with noble self-restraint through a trying interview but feels the last straw too much for human patience.

"Don't you think you might spare us both further worries for *this* day? Remember, my dear Alice, that after a year's absence, during which a man nurses all manner of dreams of happiness, this alteration of ours is hardly the kind of thing he has a right to expect."

"I—am—sorry. I thought to—but no matter! I hoped you would be glad to see me and to hear I was not quite a pauper." Alice spoke in deeply humbled sadness, in tender apology, although not wavering. Slowly two rare, big tears rolled down her cheeks.

In a quick change of mood, Clarence caught her in his arms.

"My poor darling. You look lovely like that, so sweet—a rose drenched in dew. There, let me be your sunshine and kiss your dear face dry! Ah! if only you would listen to my advice—but never

mind! We will not quarrel any more. Listen, Alice! Say you do love me a little—as much as ever! You haven't said so yet; you have not given me one little least word of love. . . . What—some, do you say? Well, not half enough then. Let's both be happy now say you are happy Hooray, you are, for you look it!"

CHAPTER XXV.

YES: Alice was happy again that day. Yet when midnight brooded over Carnegie Pen she was still awake, leaning out of her window in the warm, welcome darkness, her head framed in her hands.

"What does this mean?" So she arraigned her other self, the sad half of her being that all afternoon and evening had lain asleep in the sorrow-chamber of her heart. Now it was awake and crying in the still watches. Its joyful twin, her other self, after the icy douche of Clarence's displeasure which was as water on flame, revived later under his endearments, as is the proverbial end of lovers' quarrels. But now——

"I am a discontented, ungrateful wretch! Here in the old house, with only kind friends under its roof, in the island and place that for weeks past I have been yearning to see. Why should melancholy steal over me like this? Until Clarence left us after dinner, whilst he was laughing and chaffing with everybody, I felt as gay as ever before. But the minute he drove away all the sunshine seemed blotted

out. . . . It can't be pining for his presence. He is coming to-morrow to lunch, certainly; perhaps to dinner. And he is asked for every day and all day, so long as we stay here."

Certainly Captain Blower was most hospitable. Having driven to fetch his guests, and meeting De Lacy before the latter had ridden back to Up-Park, the hearty seaman, at a hint from Eglinton, made ready friends with the young officer, to whom he gave the above invitation.

"He's a ripper!" confided Clarence, enthusiastically to Alice. "I'm coming out this very evening to dinner, and if his claret and his cook are as good as they say, what with present company, I shall be in clover."

Neither Clarence nor Alice heard the skipper's bluff aside to William Eglinton, at the time:

"But dash it! What's your game, anyhow? I thought my weather eye was pretty wide awake, but why you want that curly-haired Adonis asked over to spoil sport fairly bothers me."

"I've no game, Blowhard, old friend. Let the young people be happy while they can. They have a flirtation together: and they think it's a tremendous attachment."

So Clarence came out to Carnegie Pen, and what with his endless, amusing stories of his regiment and Jamaican customs and manners he was the central figure of the merry party. What did Cousin Charlotte mean, nevertheless? For, instead of greeting

De Lacy with her old effusiveness, she was amiably nervous, and later on kept eyeing him with an air of criticising regret, or so Alice fancied. "How do you think him looking?" the latter felt she must inquire, whilst feigning indifference. "Older looking, of course."

"Ye—es," returned Charlotte, dubiously. "He has lost his delicious peach complexion, and is not quite so—well, so like a dancing fawn as he used to be. After all," nodding in exasperating condonation: "All men are alike, so I suppose it must be so."

"What must be so?" demanded Miss Bamfield, on the instant, jealous for her Clarence's good looks, vaguely uneasy at this confirmation of the nameless change she herself had part perceived, part divined, in her future helpmate.

But this abruptness confused poor Mrs. Dundas, who floundered promptly into a quagmire of excuses, self-contradictions, and assurances, probably real, that she did not know exactly what she had meant.

Tip, also, this evening was less genial than she should have been. In truth, that most unforgiving personage had not forgotten Clarence's crime in omitting to wish her good-bye. This evening, after frolicking round the shrubberies pursuing a blackavised housemaid with mutual peals of laughter, she raced back to the rest of the party and flung herself breathless upon Eglinton.

"You never saw such a queer little beastie as was

climbing up that palm tree. It had feet to run with as well as wings, and Clarissa says it's a rat-bat and they are quite common. Isn't Jamaica splendid?"

"Oh, splendid!" jeered Clarence, "with the grass ticks swarming underfoot and dropping off every branch upon you. I've been here just long enough to know it is a rotten island."

"Well, you looked like as you were enjoying it ever so much when you were riding last night with your hand on the back of that lady's saddle," retorted the indignant child. "We saw you, did not we, Cousin Charlotte?" (with malicious intonation).

"No, indeed. I was looking the other way. I saw nobody," returned Mrs. Dundas, hastily.

"What does Amabel mean?" inquired Clarence loftily of the circle. They were seated in the stone hall which was well lit (Captain Blower being of an age to dislike damp and darkness out of doors, he said), and all could see the color deepen on the young man's face. At once Alice came to his rescue with a brave air of indifference.

"Never mind her. Only we thought you passed us in the dark yesterday evening, and that you were riding with someone—a lady."

"Oh, was that all? Yes: the lady was Miss Fitzwilliam, very likely; one of the Kingston beauties. We came down, a large party from the hills all together, and went to the Fitzwilliams for supper. Mrs. Fitz is an American: a very ladylike woman."

"Well, we didn't see nobody but you two," de-

clared Tip, glowering still. "And as to Jamaica, Alice just loves it already, and so do I."

"Hooray! Stick to that, little 'un," applauded the captain, vastly pleased.

Soon after De Lacy took an early leave, explaining that he must turn out by dawn, as the general was an old owl, who hated doing work in the sunshine. Immediately upon his departure Charlotte, bless her! asked the very question Alice was palpitating to put, yet would have gone to bed miserable rather than utter.

"What sort of a girl is this Miss Fitzwilliam, Captain Blower? Is she nice?"

"Nice? Pyretha?" The captain gave a puzzled grin. "She has a fine figure of her own, and a pair of black eyes that are scorchers, as well as a lively tongue. All the young fellows at the barracks are after her: besides, she is a bit of an heiress, an only child. But she's *brown*: her father was, they say, though he showed it so little that he even got an American, a poor governess, to marry him, but she was mad angry when she found it out."

"Brown? You mean she has some black blood in her veins?" asked Mrs. Dundas and Alice in the same breath.

"That's it. 'Brown lady, black woman,' is an old Jamaican saying. Pyretha rules her mamma entirely: they entertain at a brand-new little villa with a few acres they call Eagle's Nest Pen, if you please. In olden days a pen meant an enclosure for three

hundred or more head of cattle at night, and so the estates came to be styled."

Thereupon the party dispersed to bed. As they shook hands, Eglinton wished Alice heartily a good night's rest and that no worse vision might disturb her dreams than that of her fair pictured ancestress.

"Of my own people he is the only one who was thoroughly cordial with Clarence to-day," reflected Alice. "He never shows one bit in his manner that he is annoyed with either of us for being refused: not the least little bit. Of course it is very nice of him; very; extremely——"

Now Alice's thoughts were disturbed with anxious surmises concerning the brown beauty, Pyretha Fitzwilliam. Did Clarence really admire her so greatly that he need blush at Tip's attack. What had the child seen? Surely nothing, or she would not have held her mischief-loving tongue. Yet still——

Thus on and on the hitherto healthy-minded, happy-hearted girl mused, looking into the park bathed in moonlight so bright she could distinguish the different horses grazing. Turning her head before retiring, weary and disheartened, lo and behold a beautiful spectacle amazed her eyes. The timeworn shingle roofs of the stables threw deep shadows below upon a small close, by day a mere tangle of giant leaves and tall grass. But to-night it was a fairy ballroom, where each of the invisible dancers carried a tiny lamp. To and fro they glided,

now some dying out, again flashing alive, moving as to a measured strain with such fascinating variety that Alice, kneeling on the rickety cane window-seat, could scarcely tear herself away to slip at last under her mosquito curtains.

Then, as Eglinton had said of his experience, Alice was thankful for the fireflies that had lit up the darkness of her mood. It was with a happier mind that she fell asleep, tired with the new and many impressions of the day. And, doubtless it was also because of Eglinton's prophecy that she dreamed Alice Carnegie in wide, grey-plumed hat and billowy golden hair stood by the carved four-poster looking down in sympathy, and whispering, "Men are all alike. I was disappointed, too."

CHAPTER XXVI.

At half past six next morning Alice was roused by smiling coal-black Clarissa, bearing tea and buttered toast.

The captain and Mr. Eglinton, she announced, were already gone out riding, and would want a cold bath on returning. "Fee sure, the captain him do like de water; so if the ladies wished for a plunge now was their chance."

Having seen the great bathroom, underneath the entrance hall, on the day of arrival, the ladies had agreed to visit it together in bathing costume. For, as Mrs. Dundas plaintively declared, the two tanks, which were kept full by running water, were deep enough to drown in. But not big enough for a real swim, regretted Alice, who took to water like a duck. So downstairs they went to the ground floor, disturbing various black boys, polishing shoes or brushing clothes, who scuttled off grinning, at Clarissa's vigorous bidding. The wide, stone-floored room was delightfully cool even in the noon-day heat, being kept shady by wooden jalousies discreetly veiled by creepers, through which the air

passed freely. "Ah! it is dreadfully cold," squeaked Mrs. Dundas, dipping delicately in her lesser tank, where the water only reached to her waist.

"It's grand! Splendid!" shouted Alice and Tip, who were swimming and plashing in theirs.

Returning, they perforce steered in the central and further hall round two black, kinky-headed damsels in plantigrade attitude polishing the floors with bitter orange juice, scrubbed over afterwards with half a cocoanut husk. Alice, as a good housekeeper, was interested to notice that this was the one household task the negro servant maids seemed to enjoy, and they were at it everlastingly. Both were barefoot, but their shoes waited on the outer doorsteps: one pair of aged brown kid, embroidered in tarnished gold and down at heel; the others, ball-room dowagers of soiled white satin with the sides broken.

"How untidy!" reflected the daughter of spick-and-span England. "It is easy to see that there is no lady of the house, or things would be very different." But herein Alice was over confident.

Towards eight the captain and Eglinton clattered into the stable-yard, had their cold plunge, and dressed themselves in cool white suits. There was plenty to tell at breakfast, as they enjoyed the avocado pears to begin with, ending, after the usual British tea, toast, and hot dishes, with the famous No. eleven mangoes of Jamaica.

"D'ye know why they are called so?" asked Cap-

tain Blower, "I'll tell you. Because we captured a French ship at the beginning of this century that was bringing boxes of mangoes to be planted in one of their West Indian islands. So we nat'rally did the trick ourselves. Each box was marked, and No. eleven was planted close by here and turned out the pick of the lot. There was never a mango in the island before. But, now, Lord! it seems as if every time a fruit was sucked and its stone chucked away that a tree had sprung up."

"You must instruct Miss Bamfield in all the mysteries of penkeeping," said Eglinton, slyly. "You never saw such an industrious student as she was on ship-board, reading up all she could get hold of about the island. She knows more about its history than you do, I am pretty sure."

"Why, it was——" began Alice, then checked herself. Hardly knowing wherefore she yet shrank from saying that it was Eglinton's own forethought she had to thank for providing a store of literature on Jamaica, and urging her to read this and that. Captain Blower might misunderstand, as had the ship-gossips. She changed her sentence: "It is only my duty to want to know something about this estate, and the negroes themselves."

"Right you are," applauded the captain as if proposing a toast: "You just trot round with me, my dear. Cane growing, and coffee, bananas, oranges, cocoa, cocoa nuts, I'll tell you all about 'em. I go in myself for logwood and sesil hemp. It's easy

enough to learn. Look at me! only been on shore here under two years."

The good man thought himself an authority, so presently Alice found herself on pony back wading through swathes of cane leaves already cut, and watching the tall crop of jungly stem and leaf being laid low by stout-armed negroes. It was all picturesque, even to the captain riding the smallest nag in his stable and wearing an immense wide hat. And when he stopped every colored man, woman, or child they passed in the fields to speak to their new missus from over the sea, and asked was not Alice like the picture of her ancestress in the house, then with what curiosity and acclamation of wide smiles and rolling eyes she was greeted. The news that a live Bamfield, a Missy Alice Carnegie Bamfield, was among them, ran like wildfire among the lazy merry-looking gangs, and they thronged to see the owner, who till then was spoken of in the cabins at times as a half-forgotten myth: a shadowy being who might appear "some day," as was darkly hinted when anyone had a wrong to redress, or a grievance against Williamson.

And Alice smiled and laughed back, delighted with them all. She liked the easy good humor of the men; tatterdemalions though they were, because they never could be persuaded to work more than three or four days in the week. She admired the magnificent carriage and figures of the women, stepping lightly under heavy baskets or sheaves of cane

carried on their heads. Their costume began with a gaudy turban and ended in a shift and pink cotton skirt, the latter generally hitched up to the knee by a cord passed round the hips to give freedom in walking. And the jolly little "pickneys," their fat black bodies only trammelled by the scantiest of shirts. How they trotted after the captain, who knew them all by name and threw them coppers and chaff; and how knowingly each balanced the while some object or other on a curly poll, one even a glass of water for a parent, another, a knife, which was the only place to keep it safe seeing his shirt had no pocket, and that his hands were needed, remarked Blower, for promiscuous picking and stealing.

The chief spokesman addressed Alice: "Marning, me sweetie missis. Missus cleber fe true. De Lard hab given her tall hair and a wise heart. Missus give us all a dance an' supper." Then looking round at his giggling friends in reproof: "What for you laugh in dat ignorant way, he, he, like jackass for noting?"

Alice, radiant and flushed with the sunlight on her golden hair, looked a dream of beauty in the eyes of her dusky dependents. And with the spirit of chieftaincy swelling her young heart gladly she promised all they wished. Whereupon Blower roared out jollily, as if hailing a distant vessel: "Now then, boys and girls, three cheers for your little white missus!" And the jubilant hurrahs that followed might have been heard halfway to the hills.

"Isn't she sweet—like a young princess," simpered Mrs. Dundas to Eglinton. The good lady was seated crookedly on a mule which her companion carefully held by a leading-rein. Tip on his other side gave him far less trouble, although riding a pony for the first glad time in her existence.

"Alice, this is scrumptious," burst out the latter, a great breath heaving her small bosom. "The Robber would have a green fit if he were here."

"Hu—ush!" admonished Eglinton, adding to Alice on his own account: "Accept my congratulations. I would not have missed for anything being a humble partaker in your triumphal progress."

Something wistful in the man's eyes, though his voice was as pleasant as usual, moved Alice to answer:

"What a pity you have been missing all the captain has been telling me. You would like to hear when the canes require replanting and about the rich gullies, where they can grow always. And the guinea-grass here; that came from West Africa by accident. A ship captain brought over some birds that died, so he threw out their sack of seed for the voyage, and up came this lovely grass."

"But, Alice, do leave us our cavalier," entreated Mrs. Dundas. "We can't all ride in a bunch, and I dare not be left to myself a moment."

"Yes, yes. You can't have everybody in attendance on you. I want my Mr. Eglinton," added Tip, in strident tones of objection.

So they rode on as before, Alice with a little annoyance in her mind, for no girl, so she told herself rather pharisaically, could be less anxious to have men after her. Also, it seemed undignified of the others to start wrangling over Mr. Eglinton who, for his part, need not sit on his pony looking no more interested in the question than a sack of rice. It was really ridiculous in him lately to put on that kindly "dispose of me as you all like" air. He must have some preferences, some wishes of his own. He had not come out to be a slave to Charlotte's absurd fancies and the caprices of a spoiled child.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LEAVING the cane-fields the riders entered a pleasant lane hedged by yellow-flowering *lignum-vitæ*, with green thickets behind like English copses, only far more lovely.

"We are 'beating the boundaries' of the Carnegie estate," the captain explained. The lane narrowed and a reed-thatched hut rose among broad, fringed-leaved plantains, gently waving in the slight breeze, as though they were giant fans cooling the tiny dwelling. As they startled a grazing cow, an aged being, who seemed herding her and who wore a white garb and turban, rose and salaamed.

"Is this one of the immigrant coolies brought from India? I must stop and speak to him," called out Eglinton, who loved the people among whom he had so long dwelt; and at his kindly greetings in native tongue the old Hindoo's visage beamed even more than at the silver slipped into his hand.

"How pleased Mr. Eglinton looks. Now he has done a kind deed and is quite happy. He is so good, is he not?" confided Alice to her companion, with a glance of respectful friendship towards her particular squire.

"Ay, ay; too good for his own good. That's all that's the matter with him," came in enigmatical response. "Now, princess, let us jog along."

Their path dived among trees and grew rougher, the scenery lovelier. They cantered briskly till more open ground was reached, where they drew up under the shade of some big guangua trees. The captain drew Alice's attention to the ash-like leaves overhead, explaining their excellent habit of closing at sundown, allowing the succulent guinea-grass beneath to receive dew at night and shade by day. Then mopping his face several times, although he had lately jeered that anyone should call the September sunshine too warm, he blurted out:

"As we are by ourselves for a few minutes, there is a question I should very much like to ask, Miss Bamfield, if you'll forgive me my blunt fashion of speaking."

"Pray do, captain," begged Alice, cordially, though a little uneasy in mind.

"It's just this. Might you be thinking of *living* at Carnegie Pen? If so, although my ship's papers may all be in good order, never you fear. The old man will turn out and make no bones about it. D'ye see?"

"But, my dear, good captain! Did you not tell me how you had planted some thousands of young logwood trees down yonder, and hoped to see them grow up? Would you not be sorry to leave?"

"Now—now! There, no matter. Yes; and look

at that wire paling I put up only this spring, and see how all the plum-posts have taken root and are shooting. No odds, my dear girl (if you'll excuse my calling you such). You're young and ought to have your fling. Don't mind me."

Alice, looking round bewildered, saw the captain staring hard at the lovely view outspread of green savannah woods and sea, whilst close behind rose a green hill like a Swiss alp. His red face seemed unusually solemn, for the worthy old sailor had lain long awake these two nights past, troubled by the near possibilities of having to give up the darling toy of his latter years. Not guessing his fears were so keen, yet the girl protested warmly:

"How can you suppose I could be so ungenerous? Why, you told us all that first day we met, you had settled down here for life."

"Tut, tut! You're a real good sort! Don't like turning out the ancient mariner! Lord bless you! Benjamin Blower has been tossing about all his life and he's got pretty tough. Besides, a little bird has whispered that you might be soon wanting to set up house here, unless the quarters of some tip-top cavalry regiment might be more in your style or that of somebody else."

"Little birds are a plague!" exclaimed Alice, hotly. "Don't you mind their chattering, captain. The fact is I you see I can't exactly say, yet awhile. . . . Let us wait. . . . Very likely I shall have to consult my Grand Vizier,"

nodding playfully at Eglinton, who was coming at foot pace by the edge of the fields, still carefully goulding Cousin Charlotte's mule. "And to tell you a secret, it distressed me more for him than myself to find the Pen let without my knowledge, because on board ship a certain plan came into my head."

"So. And what might that be?"

"It was that possibly Mr. Eglinton might be my agent here and make the Pen his home. You must have guessed, as we all did in Kent, that his means are very scanty. Now, as he must be nearing forty, he ought to have some better occupation than merely hanging on to Lord Eaglemont's bounty. He is such a good man of business—so wonderfully well-informed in every way—it seems a shame for his gifts to lie waste. So I hoped in my own mind to be able to provide for him."

Alice ended in modest triumph.

The captain received this confidence in singular wise. First, he stared fixedly at the speaker, as if her idea could only enter with difficulty into his brain through its windows, like a piece of furniture too big for a new home. Next, he screwed up his mouth on one side nearly to his eye, repeating the process on the other side. Lastly, he solemnly wagged his head in slow disapproval, though his voice was quite affectionate:

"Look ye here, Miss Alice, don't you try to play the part of Providence, least of all to a grown man. It's a ticklish game and mostly no good.

Believe me, if our mutual friend William Eglinton is worth his salt (and he's worth a ship's cargo of it), then he knows best his own reasons for liking to be at the loose end of a rope. It may be tramp-fever; or it may be that he has been ill-treated by some woman in life. But, whatever it is, best leave him to worry it out. He ain't the sort to want food put into his mouth and then be coaxed to chew it."

Alice was mortified, though too sensible to take offence. Still she stuck to her guns, declaring:

"Well; but it is our duty in life to help everybody we can, especially those we like. And in most of the biographies I have read there was a time when only for the intervention, or good advice of friends the best of men would have missed their chance of happiness, or of lifework, or perhaps have gone under."

"Ay, ay. But maybe the man's friends at the time of trial were men. If a beautiful young lady comes along and says: 'Hi, William, let me be your good angel,' the chances are, poor William's head will be turned, and he'll want her to be his house-mate; whilst she only thinks of leading him safe to Heaven."

"I see what you mean," answered Alice, in a very quiet voice, almost humbly.

The dialogue broke off, for at this juncture the rest of the party joined them.

"Here we all are! Hooray, Mrs. Dundas, you look splendid; we'll have you a real Diana in no

time," cried the captain, gallantly, "you've taken to the saddle like—like anything."

Charlotte, indeed, was still holding tight to her pommel after having been persuaded into a gentle trot on the grass. Her shady straw hat, trimmed with white muslin, which, as she had confided to Alice anxiously, she did hope was "becoming, but not too juvenile," had wobbled down over one ear. Her delicate features were the color of a strawberry mash, from anxiety and exercise. Nevertheless, her eyes shone with a renewed light: she certainly was marvellously rejuvenated.

"Oh, thank you, captain; you have always some pretty compliment to pay," she giggled coquettishly yet nervous, afraid lest that chit Tip, or even Alice, might laugh in their sleeves.

Laying her finger-tips on Blower's arm, she begged in dulcet tones: "Won't our kind host escort me himself a little in turn; just to show you what a good pupil I have been and how cleverly Mr. Eglinton gives lessons in horsemanship." Throwing a winning glance at that trusty personage, lest he might feel slighted.

"My lady, your ladyship's least wish is as good as a command to yours truly," responded Blower, as innocently pleased as a child.

So they turned homewards. Eglinton, without any show of special gratification, now rode between the two sisters, for he kept instructing Tip constantly as to her seat and her hands. Alice secretly

felt it somewhat aggravating of him, for she wished to talk over Williamson and his wickedness. But on a hint to that effect Eglinton simply replied: "I thought we had said all there was to say. Until he answers my letter, or shows himself, what else can there be to discuss?" Then jocularly:

"Shall we settle whether we will cut off his nose and ears, as the old planters used to treat their slaves; or tie him to a tree and let the mosquitoes devour him, or to an ant hill? Blower was telling me that is still a negro punishment in vogue here—especially for naughty little girls."

"Ugh!" shivered Tip. "These darkies are very nice if they wasn't so unkind to their pickaninnies. Yesterday evening Alice an' me heard a child squealing like a pig when it's being killed. So we ran like anything, and found a woman thrashing a small boy horribly till Alice gave her some money to stop."

"A bad plan. She'll do it every evening now to earn an honest living."

"I could not help it," pleaded Alice. "But, fancy, when I thought the poor little creature must be half dead up he jumped, shook himself, and went off laughing."

"Ah, I learned long ago, after my sensibilities had been frequently harrowed, that negroes and some other races only feel titillated by a drubbing that would kill most Europeans."

As the track narrowed Tip forged ahead; show-

ing off her newly acquired skill. It so happened that Eglinton did not speak for fully five minutes.

A true lover of forestry, he was studying closely all the trees they passed, grieving in his mind at the havoc done in the glorious Jamaican woods which the captain told him were carelessly burned down by negroes squatting in the hills, who would sacrifice fifteen acres of splendid timber to clear one for their plantain patch. But Alice, after seeing him give his conversation and attention to others freely, felt injured, wrathful, then unreasonably appalled as the minutes sped.

"Is anything the matter? Have I offended you?" she at last brought out with a gulp of effort.

"Offended me? Goodness gracious, *no!* What on earth makes you ask?" Eglinton turned round, roused.

"You haven't said a word to me," petulantly.

"Neither have you to me," smiling. "Come, what shall I tell you? as one says to children. Do you know that this morning in our early ride we passed by Two Rivers demesne, and the captain pointed out the big cotton tree that marks the boundary."

"Rintinella's tree: the treasure tree! *You did not——?*"

"Don't look such a blazing reproach. You are even closing your diminutive fist" (a fact of which in her agitation Miss Bamfield was unaware). "No, I *did not!*" Eglinton was laughing outright.

Then changing his tone to brotherly reproof: "What a baby you are! I always thought you such a sensible girl till this moment."

"A girl may get tired of always being thought sensible."

"However, I forgive you, considering you did not commit that crime."

"Thank you a thousand times. Blower actually asked me to ride up and have a look at it, as it is gigantic; but I refused, thinking of you."

"Oh, that was being good. We will go quietly and see it together, you and I; and make up our minds where to dig without telling anybody. Now, we are friends again. Shake hands."

And with a bewitching smile, Mistress Alice held out her small, well-gloved hand. (Oh, sad to think, she had so soon forgotten the captain's exhortation!) The temptation assailed her, because Eglinton shook hands, so she had found out long ago, in a pleasanter fashion than anyone else. His clasp said so much: it was friendly, sympathizing, understanding.

On the present occasion it did not fail in the first two qualities. But surely there was an odd trembling in her companion's hand. Bending forward, he looked in Alice's eyes with a wistful tenderness, and he repeated her words, almost whispering in a kind of tremulous gladness: "Yes! we will go and see it together."

Alice's heart fluttered in a new and quite inde-

scribable way—pure nervousness and shame, no doubt. Her breath quickened, her bosom heaved in her trouble and swift self-reproach. Then—Eglinton gave her fingers a small shake in an indescribably farewell fashion, popped her hand down on her own knee, and said in a tone of interest: “Hullo! There is a bread-fruit tree.”

It was a chastened Miss Bamfield who proposed trotting on presently. What would Captain Blower say if he knew, she penitently asked herself. Had she been flirting, vulgarly flirting? Why, why, when good, kind William Eglinton seemed on the high road to forgetting he had foolishly once cared for her, could she not leave him in peace?

Yet—there was a small but distinct triumph in the wilful damsel’s heart, whispering: “He has not really forgotten after all!” A second and better thought followed: “But he is more loyal than I am. My own darling Clarence! your Alice is ashamed of herself.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

STILL the same first day at Carnegie Pen; but late afternoon.

Alice sat alone in the shaded central hall, trying to read as she rocked in a cane chair, but the strong breeze, "the Doctor," hurrying straight through the house from front hall-door to back hall-door, ruffled the pages. Charlotte was enjoying the Jamaican siesta, to which even Tip had succumbed. The captain, at the express wish of his man-guest, had driven Eglinton over to leave cards at the King's House. So there was no earthly good reason why Alice should not give her mind to *A Naturalist's Sojourn in Jamaica*,* in which Eglinton had marked for notice several places, beginning with the "solitaire." This lonely bird "utters his sweet but solemn trills, long-drawn and slow, like broken notes of a psalm. . . . Here, too, sits the 'hopping dick,' and whistles by the hour together a rich and mellow succession of wild notes, clear and flute-like. . . . But there is one master-musi-

*Gosse.

cian the nightingale of the Western world, the many-voiced mocking-bird. . . . If all the birds of Jamaica were voiceless except the mocking-bird, the woods, and groves, and gardens would still be everywhere vocal with his profuse and rapturous songs."

This much Alice had read and marked, thinking to herself, "I wish I could get away alone into the woods and hear these birds, for we have only seen some greenish-yellow canaries and the humming-birds round here." But heart answered mind fretfully, that to be lonely just now would be utterly unsatisfying, although when reproaching herself after her morning ride, she longed to get away from everybody for a while.

And Clarence had been expected for lunch, but had not come—not come. Rising, impatient with her own reflections, Alice went to the front hall and looked out on the sunlit park. Two riders were cantering across it; one a lady. The other looked like—yes, he was the faithless lover.

A few minutes later and black Martin announced "Miss Fitzwilliam and Mr. De Lacy." Alice out of dignity had retired into the central saloon, devoted more especially to the reception of guests than the two outer halls. But dignity was brushed aside by the smart stranger, who came forward with a confident air and elastic gait. Before Clarence could speak she had caught Alice's hand up to the level of her face, in the most affected London

fashion of that year, and waving it softly, she exclaimed:

"Welcome to Jamaica. You don't know perhaps that we are distant connections. I am Pyretha Carnegie Fitzwilliam."

"Really—a connection," answered Alice, stiffening in surprise at thought of the "brown girl." Then quickly recalling politeness. "Of course the Carnegies were here before the Bamfields. Where do you come in?"

It flashed upon her that if some Carnegie or Fitzwilliam had married a beautiful quadroon, he could hardly be blamed, judging by this gorgeous descendant.

"Don't ask me about genealogy, dear lady. Of course we are an old family, so it was some generations ago. But—*there it is.*" And Miss Fitzwilliam waived details aside with a magnificently languid gesture.

Clarence broke in, eager and smiling: "I happened to be lunching over at Mrs. Fitzwilliam's pen to-day and mentioned about your coming and owning this place. And Miss Fitzwilliam was immensely interested. Nothing would serve her but to ride over at once with me, that I might introduce you both. Wasn't it good of her?"

Alice, being a downright daughter of England, demurred in her heart, remembering that the young lady had most capably introduced herself. Likewise, that Clarence had been expected elsewhere for

luncheon. But both her visitors, seating themselves with a quite-at-home air, began a string of questions.

"You have only just come, dear lady? Well, and what do you think of Jamaica? And how long do you think of staying?" inquired Miss Fitzwilliam in a rich contralto voice. Turning her lustrous dark eyes full upon Alice she began studying the latter openly from golden head, trim despite its luxuriant waves, to small (and nowadays), well-shod foot.

As Alice, resolved not to reply to the last question, declared truthfully that each hour made her think the island more lovely, Clarence quickly aided her by asking after all the rest of the party.

"Old Eggy gone to call on the Governor. What a joke!" he cried out in a fit of laughter. Then turning to Miss Fitzwilliam: "My old tutor; you know how I often have mimicked him to you. My mother would roar if she heard it. She used to go into fits when I took off Eggy's lectures to me on doing the proper thing in life."

"From all he tells me, Mr. De Lacy's mother must be the most charming woman," declared Pyretha warmly, turning to Alice. "Have you met her in town, Miss Bamfield? Were you there for all this season?"

"No; I was a country mouse. Indeed, I never in my life have been in London for the season." Wicked Alice added this last sentence in a mischiev-

ous spirit, to see how it would be taken. Miss Fitzwilliam raised her strongly marked eyebrows; then, with a manner chilled with disdain, remarked:

"You don't say so. Mr. De Lacy, you did not lead us to think Miss Bamfield was so unsophisticated. Why, even I—born and bred in our poky island—have been home for May and June this year, and went out everywhere," laughing with superiority.

Alice was afterwards convinced she could have given a crushing retort but for the almost simultaneous entrance of both the riding party and sleep-seekers.

"Well, Eggy, we heard where you have been. Did the Governor ask you to dinner?" called out Clarence, with a side-glance at the others to draw attention to his covert fun.

"Yes. He did, for to-night. Only a family party," replied the ex-tutor, guilelessly, adding in apology to Mrs. Dundas and Alice: "But he hopes to have the pleasure of seeing both you ladies at a bigger affair later. You will get your invitation in proper form."

Then, becoming aware of several pairs of eyes fixed upon him, and that Clarence's face looked suddenly chapfallen, Eglinton asked in equal surprise:

"Why? Is there anything odd about being invited to dine with anybody? Sir Peter Plumtree and I were at Harrow together."

"Oh, nothing odd about dining with anybody,"

returned Clarence with quiet haughtiness. "Only the Plumtrees have never chosen to show me any special civility, although I let them know I was Lord Eaglemont's nearest cousin and all that. I never knew you were such a swell."

Eglinton stroked his beard, trying to hide his amusement, though his eyes danced till they met a severe look on Alice's face. Then they quickly fell.

The captain clapped De Lacy's shoulder with a mighty thwack.

"There is still some knowledge outside your head, sonny. What became of you at lunch? Your knife and fork were waiting."

"I am awfully sorry, sir; but I really had an important engagement. However, I hope you will allow me to come to dinner instead."

Clarence's glib apology was given in his sunniest manner, and Captain Blower was at once mollified.

"Right you are, lad. My old port comes out at dinner. Better biz than lunch claret, eh?" and he winked a knowing wink, to which Clarence responded with a boyish blush, and laugh.

Tea was brought in now, and De Lacy, who sat between the two girls, smiled now on Pyretha, now on Alice, with the same fatuous smile Paris must have worn when Venus and Juno each longed for the apple. (Minerva, of course, disdained to enter into rivalry, but expected the prize as due to her merit.)

"How refreshing a cup of tea is," observed Mrs.

Dundas, originally, as she played hostess. "Miss Fitzwilliam, will you take off your jacket; or you will not feel the benefit of it afterwards?"

"Good gracious! Take off my riding-coat——" and Pyretha stared with the insolence of a beauty in full bloom at the faded "old girl," as she mentally designated Mrs. Dundas.

The latter attempted a nervous giggle, painfully sensitive as the poor lady was to adverse opinion. "Dear-me, I forgot it is not winter, and that we are not at home."

"Don't say you're not at home in my house, Mrs. D., or you and I will fall out," interrupted the captain, reproachfully; then, pulling Tip's hair, he asked: "Why do little birds in their nests agree, eh?"

Alice was rapidly becoming inwardly furious with Master Clarence for his "how-happy-could-I-be-with-either" airs and graces. She answered curtly to his rallying, smiled not on him, and turned her head with marked indifference away when he compared himself to a thorn between two roses. Miss Fitzwilliam, on the other hand, gave the young man a killing glance from her large, flashing eyes, her crimson lips, vivid as poinsettia petals, were wreathed for him in smiles. All at once Clarence was unexpectedly challenged. Of all men quiet William Eglinton suddenly drew up his chair between Miss Fitzwilliam and her cavalier for the afternoon, asking in a tone of admiring homage:

"Did I overhear you saying you were in town this season? You were presented of course. I must have seen your picture in one of the illustrated society papers."

He scored a bull's eye. The fair one turned right round, and, though denying both soft impeachments, eagerly launched into talk on the London plays and Hurlingham, how she had been once to the Opera and constantly to the Park.

Meantime, Alice found herself and Clarence cut off from general observation by Eglinton's broad shoulders. Still she preserved an ominous stoniness, even for some moments after her knee was gently pressed by another. Then—she looked round once and met her lover's pathetic gaze. Clarence could assume so cherubically miserable an expression that the most strong-hearted of women found it as hard to resist as they might the pleadings of an adorable infant. Men like Eglinton and Blower, wondering at the success of the smooth-faced young fellow with women, failed to guess these last were moved unconsciously as by an appeal to the motherhood in each of them, young or old.

Thus Alice slid back into pity and forgiveness, whilst De Lacy murmured reproaches against her hard-heartedness, mingled with joyous intimation that he was really coming this evening, and after dinner—then—outside—he would scold her, oh, yes! and so forth. He broke off listening, as Blower announced:

"Young people all! I'm afraid things will be dull for my guests here whilst so many of our neighbors are still in the hills. But in a fortnight they'll all be down, and then I'm willing to give any kind of party you all like. Only name your spree."

"Oh, a dance, captain," urged Pyretha, her deep voice drowning the thanks and assurances of present enjoyment of the rest. She rested her hand on the captain's shoulder and smiled up in his face with what Mrs. Dundas afterwards indignantly termed brazen impudence. "Nothing like a dance. Let me settle it all for you. I'm grand at that sort of thing."

"Don't doubt you, my dear," returned the jolly tar, patting her hand; "only, you see, Miss Alice Carnegie Bamfield here has the casting vote. Ah! you say a hop, too, princess. That's a clincher."

"Well, you will want one of your lady friends to receive for you, captain," pursued Pyretha, throwing another captivating glance right into the citadel. "Any of us, your old neighbors, will be only too proud and pleased to help you."

"Thank ye, fair flatterer. I'll not forget that sweet promise when needed. Only with such a pattern of what a perfect lady should be, as Mrs. Dundas here, in the house, I can't do better than ask her to face the crowd for me."

As Blower's full-moon visage turned to shed its ruddy beams on Charlotte, who was all a-flutter between nervousness and guileless delight as if she

were a young girl, Pyretha jerked away her hand.

"Well, I hope your dance will be a success, I'm sure. Now it is time for us to be going. Where is my young man? Come along, Mr. De Lacy," saucily beckoning with her whip like a Diana rating a stray hound. "Oh, am I taking him away from you, Miss Bamfield? That is too bad."

"Not at all. We will lend you his escort to see you home, as we expect to have plenty of his society by-and-by," returned Alice, crossing swords at once with a light laugh. Her blue eyes met the other's dark ones in a quick, gay glance. Both at once felt that they detested each other.

Eglinton, who was standing by, stroked his beard, saying to himself: "I thought as much."

Captain Blower waddled nimbly down the steps to see the riders off, then returned to impart some news.

"She tells me that John Williamson is not at Two Rivers, but over at his Moneague Pen, which may account for his silence towards you. I asked her as John is one of her hopeless admirers, so she would very likely know."

"How any man can admire a forward, ill-bred thing like that, is more than I can understand," Cousin Charlotte permitted herself to say with affected horror, as she glided out of the room to make an elaborate toilet for dinner.

"Ho! Ho! A strapping fine lass, and sings!—she has a voice of her own like a mocking-bird," the

skipper declared in a tone of judicial jollity. But no sooner was Mrs. Dundas fairly gone than he blew off steam.

"I believe that hussy Pyretha wanted to receive my guests. Did you see how she dropped hold of me like a hot potato when I put her in her place? Set her up, indeed! Now, what I do admire in Mrs. Dundas is that she is such a lady. No cock-a-hoop manners. I do hate your stuck up women."

"You like her 'cause she's cushiony-wushiony," said Tip.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE following two days were spent in much the same way as their predecessor, only now both Alice and Tip rose in the grey dawn and joined in the riding parties at six o'clock. The sun rose punctually as it had set at six the evening before. How cool was the air, and dewy the grass, as they cantered through the park and out into the green lanes. Now they passed thatched hamlets embowered in tropical luxuriance of leafage. Then how picturesque the groups of straight, strong, dark girls striding to market carrying great baskets of bananas, mangoes, or heavy sheaves of guinea-grass on their heads, as easily as they often did a glass of water.

"If they have much to learn, these darkies could still give many Europeans lessons in politeness," observed Alice, amused and pleased as a group called out, "Good evenin', sah," "Good marnin', missus," with characteristic carelessness as to the time of day. Ahead rode two or three negroes on donkeys: women, girls, and children filed after them laden with heavy burdens, or square water-pannikins balanced on their round head-cottas. Yet

all were smiling, or jesting, as they trooped onward with light carriage: no trudging step, no slouching gait among these barefooted, lightly-clad children of the tropics.

"What a pity their faces are so grotesque! Their figures are splendidly classical and their brown limbs so shapely," was Eglinton's answering remark, with an artist's perception of the perfectly developed torsos.

"Ay, there goes Quashie, the squatter, up to his acre in the hills," grumbled Blower. "In the time of your good old slave-owners, labor was concentrated on the estates. But now, except for Indian coolies, we should never get on. I can't altogether blame Quashie either, for he has a lovely time. His wife Quashaba will work hard all this day, whilst he lies on his back, then he'll ride down again in the cool."

After breakfast the new comers inspected, one morning, the coffee plantations and cement barbecues, where the berries were dried in the sun. Another time it was the sugar-mill, whilst the captain lectured on rum and molasses. In the afternoons, most of the little party fought mosquitoes and sought slumber. Only Eglinton drove into Kingston and was closeted for an hour with the solicitor whom he had engaged to look after Alice's interests. The others supposed him gone to the Museum, where he had already made friends with the curator. Alice alone knew his errand and demurred to his

facing the heat, though faintly, for she was daily more and more anxious to know how matters stood.

"Only 86 to 90 in the shade. It was hotter in London last July," replied Eglinton. He knew from various innocent queries what was in Alice's mind. "Will there be enough for me and Clarence to marry on?" Well, so far as it lay in his power, the young people should know soon. "I have put my hand to this plough and mean to drive the furrow, though it be through my own garden patch;" he told himself with stern resignation to his own solitary future.

Alice, it must be owned, was somewhat trying, after the manner of women, as to business, reiterating: "Surely, there must be less for me to restore if the Williamsons have been putting rent for this Pen in their own pockets all these years?"

"Very likely. We shall get all that cleared up when Williamson gives an account of himself. We don't know yet what he may have to say, remember."

"Well, but what *do you* think is delaying him? Why does he not at least write?"

As if good William knew any better than herself. But he only smiled forbearingly and went his way in the heat. "Will she thank me in years to come?" he wondered in his heart. "Here am I smoothing the way for that boy. But if Clarence is not good to her——"

And William Eglinton clenched his sunbrowned lean hand, that had done so much hard work in life, yet none harder than this. God grant that his reward might not be that of making the girl miserable whom he loved as much as, yea more than, ever in the still depths of his heart!

CHAPTER XXX.

"You must all come over to Up-Park and have tea in my quarters," Clarence gaily proposed, and the idea was as gaily accepted.

So, on the Saturday, the Carnegie Pen party drove in buggies to the camp of the West Indian regiment. Alice looked eagerly at the long rows of wooden buildings with their borders and garden filled with dracaenas and crotons, besides coleas and caladiums brought in from the hills, where they grew in wild beauty. Would one of those neat little houses belonging to the married officers shelter her some day, too? And when——?

It was a delightful party. De Lacy's friends in the regiment—and they were all of the light-hearted, cheerful young fellows—mustered strong. The table groaned with Jamaican fruits and delicacies, laughter and talk filled the little room, overflowing into the verandah. Clarence, looking his handsome debonair self, at his very best, saw to the wants of everyone. Certainly, hospitality flowed in De Lacy's Irish blood. He was an ideal host, and never happier than when, as now, he felt him-

self the life and soul of an entertainment, and that, thanks to his songs and cunning sandwiches, his ready wit and watchful eye, nobody "was out of it," and all went off splendidly.

Miss Fitzwilliam seemed throning it in the room at first, surrounded by a court of youngsters. But when most of these swarmed round Alice, the new attraction, Pyretha skilfully retreated to the verandah, under cover of a violent flirtation with the only captain present.

Everyone was so friendly in their kind greetings to the new comers, that Alice's blue eyes danced as never before at the old golf or croquet parties in Fordhurst. Then, how often had she tasted the bitterness of being a nobody!—at least in the eyes of the Marchmonts. Had she not overheard herself described "as poor little Miss Bamfield. Niece to that queer hermit in the tumbledown old house near the church."

But here, these strangers welcomed the bright girl as they might a relative of their own. Two or three officers' wives present, young and pretty, made Alice feel she was quite after their own hearts. The young men vied eagerly in begging Miss Bamfield to come to all their regimental entertainments.

"Hallo, you are going it. You are having a success," whispered Clarence, pausing in his duties to oust his greatest chum, Lovibond, from a post beside Alice's chair.

"I say, De Lacy, fancy! Miss Bamfield has never

been inside barracks before," put in Lovibond, who refused to retreat further than he could help. "She is admiring everything, and I tell her it is a pity she has seen your furniture first, for nobody else boasts any half so expensive."

Pyretha Fitzwilliam, who had returned when her captain grew restive, broke in with a somewhat jeering laugh:

"What simple tastes you have, Miss Bamfield. How would you like to be an officer's wife and live in the camp here?"

"That might depend on the officer," returned Alice with spirit. Her blue eyes were alight but her manner calmly self-possessed. Eglinton, watching from a distance, thought admiringly no duchess could show more quiet dignity.

"Ho, ho! Fancy the mistress of one of the loveliest old houses in Kent putting up with poky quarters," exclaimed Clarence, with a nervous thrill in his voice. Then, under cover of a rival banjo's thrumming, he reproached Alice, playfully:

"You little duffer! Why did you give yourself away to the Fitzwilliam girl the other day, telling her you had not been about in the world, so now she tries to sit on you? I keep cracking you up to everyone as no end of an heiress and a smart young woman."

"No good in false pretences, dear boy," returned Alice, equally low. "Sooner or later, one is bound to be found out."

Meantime, in a corner, Eglinton was greatly enjoying the confidence of a pale, peevish matron, whose name he had not caught when Clarence jauntily rattled it off on introduction.

"That dreadful girl," moaned the lady, alluding to Miss Fitzwilliam, "whatever makes her so rude to your sweet young sister? . . . Oh, my! not your sister? And you say Py—reether perhaps did not mean rudeness" (this with nasal twang, and long drawn intonation of the culprit's name). We—ell, you don't know Pyreetha. She's a terror! I just wish my worst enemy had Py—reetha for a daughter one month. I ought to know, for I'm her mother."

"What's that you are saying, mother? I am sure it is something about me from the way you are playing peek-a-boo with Mr. Eglinton," called out Pyreetha in her rich, commanding tones. And Mrs. Fitzwilliam guiltily shrank and presently faded away from Eglinton's neighborhood. Instantly his confidence was claimed by little Mrs. Howlett, a pretty blonde, who rejoiced in the title of the Pet of the regiment, and strongly resented the attempts of "*that* Fitzwilliam girl" to enter into rivalry. "And I don't mind telling you" (this with flattering emphasis to Eglinton) "that she speaks of Miss Bamfield as that 'prim little cousin of mine.' And before you came Mr. De Lacy was praising Miss Bamfield's feet ('and they are nice, I must say,' generously). "So that impudent creature called

out, 'What a blessing! for otherwise your Kentish heiress is quite insignificant. We'll call her Goody Two-Shoes.' It's rank jealousy, for Pyretha's own feet show a touch of the tar brush. 'Dey cover up de ground.' "

"Certainly Miss Bamfield has pretty feet and hands: the prettiest I ever saw," remarked Eglinton, looking across at Alice, with sturdy partisanship. "And as to calling her insignificant, that is absurd. She has a will and brains and sense of honor of which many a man might be proud. Besides, to me she seems uncommonly—er—good-looking."

"All these boys say so. They are raving over her fair hair and neat figure, so well-groomed, they say. Yes; she will be one of those tight little women who rule the world—like me."

And the speaker shot a sparkling glance at the visage beside her. But it was wrapt in reverie.

A pout, a shrug, and Mrs. Howlett, like a humming-bird, whirred off elsewhere. Pyretha, who, in spite of her commanding height, could glide gracefully, slid into her rival's vacated seat. In her rich tones, lowered to a seriously captivating key, the beautiful girl respectfully murmured: "And what was your dinner like at Government House?"

"Eh? Oh, rather like other family dinners; one entrée and china menus on the table," came in answer, as if the speaker were waking reluctantly from a dream.

After some more vain attempts to regain her

supposed conquest Pyretha suddenly asked: "What's your Christian name? William! Well, I shall call you William the Silent."

"Take care, or I may call you the Queen of Sheba," returned the provoking ex-pedagogue with a bow. And Mrs. Howlett, whose pretty ears were pricked, told gleefully her rival's rebuff to everyone she met for a week.

Captain Blower now announced he must get under weigh as Mrs. Dundas, his charge, wished to do a little shopping in Kingston before sundown. But Eglinton, seeing Alice looked disappointed at this, quickly proposed:

"You have not seen the Windward Road, and they say it is pretty. Let me drive you there."

"Yes, gladly. Besides, you have not seen it either, only I don't believe you ever considered that," said his gracious lady.

CHAPTER XXXI.

As Eglinton and his companion drove off, other couples, officers and their wives, were cantering on wiry Jamaican ponies over the grassy plain, enjoying the cool of the evening.

"Now, that is what I call a really social party," exclaimed Alice. "And he—I mean Clarence, was a good host; was he not?"

"Splendid. He was quite like his own self. He is a dear, good boy after all."

Alice winced, but bravely forebore to ask wherein her Clarence seemed altered.

Out they two drove by the Dubby (ghost) gate, where someone was once murdered, therefore no black sentry will do duty any more. Ahead, the salt water, smooth as oil, gleamed in the low sunbeams seen through glorious greenery. Not a wavelet even lipped the grasses under the branches overhanging the shore, so sheltered was this furthest end of Kingston bay by the long green ridge called the Palisades. This ends in the handful of houses, where once stood the infamous treasure

city of Port Royal, reeking with wickedness, gorged with ill-gotten gold.

Eglinton began telling, as they went, about the "Brethren of the Coast," of whose evil deeds Alice knew little. How these were pirates of every nation, banded against Spain, because she claimed alone the right of trading with the West Indies. How, making Hayti their lair, they there lived on the numerous wild cattle, drying their meat in *boucans*, or sheds, whence came their name of buccaneers. How their cruelties to their captives were devilish, yet some pirates had daily prayers at sea, and once, when two of the worst bandits were taken prisoners, lo! they were found to be women, and so escaped hanging, though themselves had roasted captives over slow fires, to extort confession of hidden treasure. And always to Port Royal in Jamaica the seamen of the black flags sailed when their ships were heavy with groaning slaves, and jewels and gold and silver torn from the high altars of churches.

There dawned at last the 7th June, 1792. Port Royal harbor was full of vessels, among them some pirates. The sky glowed like a furnace, the sea was still. It was noon and almost all the inhabitants were enjoying their mid-day meal. Then came a noise of thunder in the mountains. The earth quaked, gaped; the sea rose in great waves. Ships crashed against ships in the tumult; some were thrown high on shore, others engulfed. Shrieks

filled the air, for Port Royal town was swallowed up quick by earth and sea, and there was an end thereof.

Eglinton drew near presently, both to the end of this discourse and to a corner, where a steep hill, billowing with glorious masses of different foliage, rose against the evening blue. Here the salt water crossed the road, and the ponies halted gladly in the shallow ford beneath the shade of cocoa-nut palms gracefully bending their fruit-laden crowns.

"How lovely, lovely, it is! Look at the water, so deliciously clear and tempting," uttered Alice in a burst of rapture.

"Yes. Nice bathing but for the sharks."

"Oh, how I should love to drive right round the island. This Windward Road goes a long way, they say."

"Well, you might put up with the lodging-houses, and I can sleep anywhere from a hayloft to the kitchen table. But—Mrs. Dundas!"

The same thought stole into both their minds. How well, truly, they could both enjoy many things together but for Mrs. Grundy, as represented by Cousin Charlotte.

Then Alice said, feeling her way, for in spite of the captain's lecture this wilful young woman hoped she might after all know best: "You are enchanted with Jamaica. Would you not like to spend the rest of your days here? To me it seems ideal."

"Not altogether so to me. There would not be

work enough. What do I mean? Why, my share in the world's work. No one ought to go through life without trying to leave the earth, or some of its creatures, a little more to the good for his spell of existence."

Alice looked up with widened eyes. Surprised respect was jostling aside respectful pity in her secret estimation of her companion. She softly faltered:

"But have you any work? Forgive me for seeming inquisitive. But I thought—we all thought—you were quite an idle man."

"Have I been so idle since you have known me, then?" in gentlest reproach.

"No—oh, no! You have worked from morning till night. What should I have done without you? But before then——"

"Before then, when I was coaching Clarence De Lacy, you mean. Well, did he not pass his exam.? Was it not useful to have kept him out of mischief so long as he was under my eye? No blame to him, mind." (This in haste, as if afraid Alice might think a sting lurked in the tail of his self-apology.)

"Yes, yes," in eager, glad assent. Nevertheless woman's pertinacity added: "Only you don't seem to me to get sufficient reward. If you took to being a regular army crammer, for instance, on the strength of this success, you might be ever so much more successful and useful. And with my affairs, you——" hesitating out of delicacy—"well, I want

you to get some reward for all your kindness, if only I knew how. It could not be enough; that I recognize."

"It is more than enough, to have your kind thanks," was the firm reply. "Never mind rewards. All who do their work well get fair wages, no fear; though maybe not of the star and ribbon kind. And some of my work lies in helping other people. Builders need the hodman. But there is a good deal of my life of which you know little or nothing. Believe me, I generally have my hands full."

Alice suddenly realized how little she did know—had cared to know—of her good friend's past years, his present desires, occupations.

"You must think me a most selfish being," she uttered, impulsively. "Do tell me more about yourself. I only heard Uncle Peter speak of your lonely life in India. You told him everything, did you not?" This in a tone of innocent jealousy.

"A little. Does one ever tell any other human being everything about oneself?" returned Eglinton, softly laughing. "Some day perhaps I may bore you with my story. Now it is time to be getting homewards."

True; for the sun had dropped, and tropical night was swiftly drawing her thickly-spun veil over the earth. Eglinton soon pulled up to light the lamps. Then they drove on through the gloom, so fragrant that in the thickly wooded lanes the air was nigh oppressive. Every now and then the carriage wheels

plashed through pools left by late heavy rains. And once, passing a cabin whence from the open doorway a lamp lit the road, a voice shouted in friendly warning: "Take care, sah! De gully is bad ahead." Next minute one wheel just grazed a deep hole, into which it might easily have floundered.

"You are not frightened?" asked William in a protecting tone, almost foolish, considering that Alice was—well, generally considered plucky enough to take good care of herself. But perhaps night made a difference. For the masterful maiden answered with as trustful timidity as the weakest of her sex:

"I could not be frightened, you drive so splendidly. But it was a horrid hole." And, sensible though he generally was, the man's heart swelled with quite ridiculous pride at her praise. So on they two drove, side by side, their lamps revealing glimpses of thatched cabins nestling in banana thickets, whilst overhead generally stretched the vast branches of a cotton tree. Again, when the ponies rattled into little hamlets through groups of evening gossips lit by the passing light-beam, how eyes and teeth seemed agleam in the dark faces that were crowned by turbans, unless baskets or pitchers were deftly balanced on woolly heads.

On again into scented darkness, where a will o' the wisp light of tender greenish hue flits through the thickets. There follows soon another and another, for the fireflies are coming out one by one

like stars. And so, the rattling beat of the ponies' hoofs quickening as they snuff their stable, back to the inviting lights streaming from the open doors and windows of Carnegie Pen.

Eglinton was following Alice, who tripped up the steps, when she stopped short, touching his arm. Both heard a strange, deep laugh mingling with the captain's fog signal sounds of mirth and Cousin Charlotte's lady-like notes of glee.

"What a chatterification! I was hoping we should have a nice quiet evening to ourselves," muttered William.

"Never mind! Our drive has been a dream," murmured Alice.

Entering, dazed and happy from the outer gloom, they saw a brown-visaged gentleman in frock-coat and lavender gloves, nursing a tall white hat on his knee. He was smiling from ear to ear at Mrs. Dundas, who indulgently regarded him much as a powdered belle of old might a queer country cousin.

The captain, lolling back in his capacious chair, legs crossed and thumbs touching, was dividing his attentions between a whisky and soda and an elderly lady in widow's weeds. The latter owned aquiline features and a fine figure. Her hair once all golden showed now part silvered. Her face might have been that of a nun, so sedate, devout was its expression, except when her glance rested on the brown-visaged man. Then it lit up with affectionate pride.

Up sprang the latter and ran at Alice with a large, outspread hand.

"This is herself. The Lord be praised. Mamma! mamma! Come and welcome Miss Bamfield, and say how glad we are to see her."

The quiet woman rose, and her face shone as she gently took Alice's left hand, her son still grasping fast the right one.

"The dear Lord keep her and bless her!" she said in a tone of sweetness and sincerity that went straight to the hearer's heart.

"You are both most kind," stammered Alice, confused, but pleased by the beaming gladness on both faces that scanned hers in delight. "Captain Blower, Cousin Charlotte, will you not introduce your visitors to me by name?"

For the skipper was grinning mischievously on her slight embarrassment. Mrs. Dundas airily rustled forward, encircling Alice's waist with one arm, with quite needless affection in that young woman's opinion:

"Guess!" she archly asked. Then with a dramatic gesture. "Oh, my dear Alice, this is a most charming gentleman—and his dear mother!—and I am sure he is all that is good and upright, and I do hope you and he will be the best of friends. At least, from the very pleasant talk he and I have had together, I am sure it would not be his fault—not, of course, that I mean for a moment it would ever be yours." With a peacemaking laugh she paused for breath, when the smiling visitors struck in, both speaking together:

"I am John Williamson."

"I am John Williamson's mother."

"Oh," said Alice, somewhat grimly. And she looked round for Eglinton as an ally against the unexpected nature of this attack. But for once he was helpless.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"THEY'VE been waiting to see you these two hours, princess. Her ladyship, Mrs. Dundas, and me found 'em stuck fast on their chairs," sang out the captain.

"We did not mind at all. We only hoped you were enjoying your afternoon and drive, nicely, my dear," said Mrs. Williamson, gently.

"Why, what is two hours? We have been waiting for a live Bamfield to come back for 'over a hundred years," laughed Williamson, rubbing his hands cheerfully. "Now, why did your family neglect us in poor Jamaica so long?"

"Well, I think some of my predecessors should have come," replied Alice, gravely. "But I will do my best to make up for their omissions."

"That's right: just so," agreed Williamson, smiling. "And let me apologize for my apparent dilatoriness in hastening to meet the heiress, so to speak, and rendering a good account of my stewardship." Then he volubly explained how staying at a friend's estate the late rains had swollen three river mouths through which he must perforce drive along the

coast. Therefore, till the flood subsided neither could he receive a letter nor leave for home.'

"Won't you sit down?" said Miss Bamfield. "Let me introduce Mr. Eglinton, a kind friend who is helping me in my affairs at present."

Perhaps there was something in Alice's tone of quiet decision that caused a general silence, as if all awaited her behests.

"Can't you help? Say something," she reproached her apparently useless counsellor, in undertones.

"Where is Tip?" said William Eglinton.

Yes: where was Tip?

Nobody had seen her these two hours; nobody knew. The skipper had halloed for her in vain on his return, so supposed she was playing pranks with Ambrosiana, her favorite housemaid. Mrs. Dundas now fussily sought the truant in the adjoining bedrooms, in the dining-room—in vain. The butler just then appeared with an india-rubber face pulled as long as if seen in the hollow side of a spoon.

"Please, cap'n, please, Missie Alice, where is Missie Amabel? Melaikoia (this was the cook) hab kep' her cassava cakes, but she nebber come to tea when I served it for dese lady and gentleman," bowing with a grandiose air to the Williamsons.

"Not had her tea! Then something must be wrong," exclaimed Alice, springing up. "Oh, why did I leave her?"

The fact was, that, seeing a buggy only holds

two persons comfortably, the couples that day rather wished to be rid of Tip's importunate elbows in their ribs and interruptions in their conversation. She was propitiated by Blower himself requesting her as a mighty favor to exercise the ponies with a groom in attendance. And half sulky, suspecting her company was not wanted, yet despising being driven now she could proudly ride, the house-tyrant accepted the arrangement. She returned safely: Ambrosiana had further helped on her evening frock.

"We servants hab been searching dis hour ourselves—not to frighten you," imparted Martin, gloomily. Then in a tone of awful meaning: "Dere is still de middle of de pond, where it is deep——"

Alice gave a low outcry of distress. Mrs. Dundas wailed, wringing her hands:

"Oh, dear, dear! Our poor darling. Where can she be?"

"Here she is! Don't be silly, Cousin Charlotte," said a muffled voice from somewhere close by. "Don't you be frightened, Alice, I'm all right."

With a hasty hand Alice dashed aside a curtain and revealed a small girl, sitting hunched up on the floor, her arms round her knees and her face and hair a study in pink and red.

"I haven't been doing anything mean," was the culprit's defiant declaration, glowering round; "Alice understands," with intense significance, further emphasized by a nip of her sister's arm.

Later on, Alice learned with what faithful self-denial the little sentinel had watched from ambush over the Robbers. Not for her to be beguiled like "some people" by the feints and blandishments of those who had entered the house cunningly in the absence of its lawful mistress. No.

At this time the sound of wheels outside diverted attention from Tip to a new visitor. An extremely small man, dapper, and self-assertive as any robin, came briskly up the steps and stood a moment at the open door, his wide planter's hat in hand.

"Wright! Come in, man alive. Bless my soul, if you haven't come to dinner you must stay; you and the Williamsons; the whole boiling. It's a quarter to eight," bellowed the captain. "You're most welcome, my friend, if you don't spoil the fish."

"Yes, by all means. I meant to ask hospitality if you had not offered it. This is the first moment I could call on Miss Barnfield. Please present me in proper form." Then to Alice, with genial politeness: "My wife and I only heard yesterday in our hill home the news of your arrival. To-day I came down on business to Kingston, and late though it is would not delay longer paying my respects to the representative of one of our oldest island families."

"Spoken like a book. Hooray," cried the skipper. "Martin, everybody stays for dinner." ("Now Mrs. Williamson, don't look at John in that hesitating way. It is more blessed to give than to re-

ceive, you can't keep all the blessings for yourself.") "And Martin, sherry and bitters for Mr. Wright."

Thereupon the ladies retired to make a hasty dinner toilet, Mrs. Dundas effusively inviting Mrs. Williamson to come and take off her bonnet: "For a widow's veil is so heavy—ah! I know!"

"You see, we are all good friends and neighbors here, Miss Bamfield, as I hope you will find us," cordially observed Mr. Wright, after an excellent dinner, in which turtle soup, calipeva (the Jamaican salmon), green corn, yams, fried plantains, and cocoa-nut cream all played a part. Everyone now began to beam restfully on each other at dessert. He added in careless cheeriness:

"Dunn tells me he is acting as your lawyer. An excellent fellow and an old friend of mine; you could not have had a better man. We ran against each other in Kingston to-day, so we had a—we'll call it a lemon squash together. Pernicious habit, my dear young lady. By-the-way, Williamson, you might save Miss Bamfield the expense of a lawyer's letter from Dunn, if you'll drop in at his office on Monday." ("It's the price of gloves, my dear." This in a fatherly tone to Alice.)

Then as Williamson with hearty willingness agreed, but naturally asked: "What for?" The other went on, while peeling an orange for Tip in the shape of a basket:

"Only some legal red tape, I understand. Well, lawyers must get their living, too. Lizzard nebber

plant corn but him hab plenty. We have no end of these sayings here" (this to Eglinton, who had betrayed during dinner the keen interest of a world-tramp in picking up all scraps concerning Jamaica). "Dunn was saying he might have to send me a formal inquiry—but meantime just asked in a friendly way could I tell him why my wife's family came to have been living for two generations in this very house rent free. 'Pon my honor I don't rightly know. And Bessie, I don't mind betting, knows less: for she was only seventeen when I married her, an orphan, and she was and is a baby as to her own business. However, this much I could tell Dunn, that when our good captain here took a fancy to the Pen, and that we found our little girl thrives best in the hills, an old agreement was fished out—you saw it, Blower."

"I did, sir. It is written as if a centipede had crawled out of the ink-pot. And it says, to the best of my knowledge, that 'in return for services rendered,' a John Williamson somewhere in the end of the seventies allows one George Napper and heirs—that's Mrs. Wright's family name, is it not—to live rent free in Carnegie Pen for one hundred years. It is a queer-looking document; the jolly old dogs who put their fists to it must have had their whack of rum."

Everybody laughed, excepting Alice and her counsellor; Tip also broke short a titter, watching her elder sister keenly.

"May we inquire what those services were? They must have been rather valuable," commented Eglington, in his quiet voice that always commanded attention.

"The very thing Dunn asked, too. So I referred him to Williamson here. Eh, John, tell us."

"I—don't—know," slowly answered the agent, rolling his eyes in sudden surprise. "Papa—you know it is not a year since he died. Mamma——" He turned helplessly to his mother.

"It was a very old story, but I can recall my dear husband saying he heard something thereof from his father in youth," said Mrs. Williamson in her sweet, measured accents, sounding as if she were reading out of the Bible, Alice afterwards remarked; and indeed the sacred volume was the good woman's daily and only mental sustenance.

"Your grandfather, John, was a son of Belial, and rebelled most wickedly in secret against his King and the governor set over him by the Lord. A plot was discovered, and our grandfather would surely have been hanged but that this Napper, who was in authority, saved his life."

"So that's the story," chorused Blower and Wright. "What a rascal your grandfather must have been, John."

"He—ee!" squeaked Tip, with a wriggle of ecstasy. Catching Alice's frown the imp muttered: "Bother the mosquitoes."

Williamson turned a broad, deprecating visage on

Alice. "It was a long time ago. But if my grand-papa was wrong I am very sorry."

"We have a proverb, 'Man talk plenty him pay him fader debt,'" interrupted Wright, merrily. Williamson eyed the little man in mild reproach, continuing:

"But at least the Napper family kept Carnegie Pen nice; very nice. It was me—yes, mamma, I—who let it to our friend the captain. Mr. Eglinton, you being a business gentleman, will understand the captain pays rent, which same helps the Two Rivers Pen, that has been a losing concern for years. I thought it a good plan, but if wrong I am sorry."

"Quite so. But excuse my dulness. To whom does our host give tribute?" answered Eglinton, diplomatically, in blandest tones.

"Why to me—to Williamson—of course!" chimed in both Wright and the agent; the former adding:

"You don't suppose that because the Nappers squatted here rent free, my wife and I would think we had any right to make money out of it. Oh, old John would not stand any such game, I can tell you."

This was precisely what Eglinton wished to know, and he exchanged a quick glance with Alice. Blower happened not to have vouchsafed the information, and they as his guests refrained out of delicacy from asking him. Said Alice in her girlish tones, softly, taking a lesson from her mentor:

"What a pity Two Rivers needs so much. It must be bad ground, I suppose."

"That's it," exclaimed all three men. "Cow-itch in the cane-fields," snorted the captain, contemptuously. "And the niggers say the saltpetre has got the coffee; the roots are rotten," jeered Wright. John Williamson sighed, shaking his head.

"It's true. But still, like the husbandman in the parable, I've kind of set my heart on digging and pruning the tree, so to speak, to give it one more chance of bringing forth fruit. It's the sick pickney gets most care. Now Carnegie Pen is good land, flowing with milk and honey. But Two Rivers—you might think there was a curse upon it."

"Perhaps there was," murmured Alice. Nobody understood what she meant excepting her faithful counsellor.

Then Wright rose to leave. "It will be near midnight before I get home, and the Rolling Calf may catch me. Eh, Miss Amabel, have you heard of it?"

"Yes. Ambrosiana told me it was a horrible duppy. She said, 'It is a ca—at, but if it do want to frighten anyone it grows up till it is like a ca—af, or as big as a cow, and dat's why it is called Rollin'," piped Tip, mimicking her informant's accent. "But I'm not afraid of it."

"I wish my groom could say as much," grumbled Wright, good-humoredly. "The fellow clean bolted one night when he and I neared a dreaded haunt of this spirit of the hills. He never appeared till next day."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THEY stood together, Alice and her counsellor, under one of the noblest specimens of Jamaica's great cotton trees. Overhead spread its huge branches so wide, that it was said to shelter three hundred head of cattle. High above Eglinton's hat, and he was no meanly sized man, rose the buttressing smooth-barked roots. These formed recesses with wooden walls in which a gipsy family might dwell decently in separate cubicles.

"And so this is Rintinella's tree! It seems like a dream that you and I are standing here," uttered Alice. "Only August when Uncle Peter died, and now we are in October. Only a week since we landed in Jamaica! I seem to have done and thought more in these two months than in all the years of the old life at The Grove."

"Yes; you are having a surfeit of new impressions. But let us take our bearings quickly. Unless we bustle up we shall be late for church; besides, the others will wonder where we went."

It was Sunday evening, and under pretext of driving round the lanes before Divine service, these two

had come hither together, as Alice had so impulsively arranged—it seemed quite long ago. Sundown was nearing, and because of the hour and the day they were utterly alone.

For a minute or more William stood studying the ground. Then he gave a satisfied ejaculation:

“As plain as A B C. Here are the two rivers,” pointing to a brook purling from the hill behind, thick-set with trees, into a brown stream, curving snake-wise its lazy length through the flat ground of the plain. And see! Here are the cross paths—just where the largest river bends sharply inwards towards the tree.”

“Of course. We have found it! How happily things are settling themselves; last night I felt as if a load were lifted off my mind.”

“Because you found that neither the Williamsons nor Wrights are rogues. Still, the situation remains unchanged. Another is in your house. Here, under our feet, lies the treasure; those fields before us are the Two Rivers estate. And both these you thought of restoring.”

“Both these I will——!” Alice stamped her foot dramatically, then squeaked, because a thorn pricked through her thin stocking, and joined Eglinton in laughing. She went on rubbing her instep ruefully, whilst her companion secretly admired her foot.

“To tell you the truth, restitution towards John Williamson seems easy enough, if—if only Clarence did not set himself so against the whole business

I've never dared tell him of the treasure yet." And Alice wrinkled her nose in a funny trick of her own, expressive of worry.

"If doing the right were always pleasant there would not be much temptation in doing wrong. There! Write that down next time you set Tip a copy. Shall we be going?"

What crowds of colored folk were abroad as the buggy rattled into Kingston. Groups upon groups of black-visaged girls strolled along, holding up snowy cambric gowns gay with bright ribbons, to display embroidered white petticoats. Alice waxed enthusiastic over the good taste shown by these dark damsels in cut and color.

"Sluts on weekdays; smart on Sundays," grumbled Eglinton. "They are far too uppish. Look! Not one of them will move out of the middle of the street. "Hi—hi, there!" But he hailed in vain. The darkies only laughed without deigning to stir themselves, although the wheels grazed them.

"I did not think you could lose your temper; especially over a trifle," observed Miss Bamfield, looking roguish reproof.

"Trifles are precisely what make me irritable. There is some credit in bearing a big trial patiently. Do you think me a perfect prig?"

So they teased each other till they entered the fine old parish church, and its peace enwrapped them. As they drove home in the moonlight, Alice was unusually silent, yet when she spoke,

Eglinton thought her more gentle and sympathetic than ever before.

Clarence De Lacy was waiting on the steps, and came down in a dignified manner to greet them.

"Why so serious?" Mrs. Dundas playfully chid him. "Have you been to church and heard a very impressive sermon?"

"No. I might have gone with your party had I been asked," was the lofty answer. "Then I would have driven you home." This last to Alice in a marked manner.

"Oh, why did you not?" she replied in the peacemaking tone she had so often used to Peter Bamfield. "We should have been so pleased."

"You can't come with us next Sunday, 'cos we'll all be up in the Blue Mountains staying with Mr. and Mrs. Wright," announced Tip, triumphantly.

"Going up there. How is that? I never heard of all these plans."

Clarence's forehead took a deep crease and his tone an aggrieved frostiness. Various voices joined Alice in soothing explanations. Mr. Wright's last words before he left had been an urgent invitation to the whole party to come up and see the famed beauty of the hills before the October rains should have set in. This very morning a black boy brought a note from Mrs. Wright, warmly endorsing the wishes of her husband. Captain Blower was radiant, declaring the plan fitted in with his wishes for general enjoyment like a duck's foot in mud!

"Oh, well," returned Clarence, in a mollified tone, still markedly addressing Alice only: "I'll see if I can ride up to join you."

"Talking of riding, how quickly you went off yesterday after your delightful party with Miss Fitzwilliam. You must have had your pony waiting saddled. Ah, naughty boy! The captain and I saw you," prattled Mrs. Dundas. And with the excellent intention of just giving the young man a little lesson she shook a warning finger.

Alice felt as if she had received an electric shock. Looking swiftly round however she saw Clarence's face ominously sulky. At once she retorted: "And pray, why should he not ride with Miss Fitzwilliam or anybody else? You and Captain Blower were off larking, too."

Cousin Charlotte in her simplicity, besides apprehension lest she had offended Alice, at once began stammering distressfully: "Oh, I assure you . . . but it is quite different . . . a married woman, I mean a widow."

Everyone laughed; the skipper loudest.

After dinner the moonlight and Mrs. Dundas's persuasive reminders that it had not rained for several days, tempted even Blower out of doors. As the rest sat and some smoked, Clarence rather imperatively urged Alice to come with him for a turn. Very slowly she rose; moved down the moonlit drive reluctantly, it seemed; was persuaded with yet more hesitation into the shrubbery darkness. Then their talk became one-sided.

"Please—please, don't. . . . Do take care. . . . The rest will see us. What will they think?"

"They will think that we are lovers, that's all."

"But they don't know we are engaged; not for certain. They may misjudge me, and there is the child—I must set her a good example. Oh, dear Clarence, may not tell them openly we are going to be married?"

A silence. They were standing under an akee tree of which the branches, laden with rosy fruit, stretched close to Mrs. Dundas's window. Impossible to see Clarence's face in the darkness. But Alice, with sinking heart, guessed by his relaxed embrace something was wrong.

"That is partly what I came this evening to speak to you about. I hardly like to tell you, but—well, truth had best come out. I've had bad luck, Alice, darling. I've dropped some money, my poor child. Not much: not anything to a rich man. But until that is paid we can't afford to get spliced."

"Lost money. What? Again!" the last unlucky word slipped out unawares. Alice could have bitten her tongue in vexation, for instantly Clarence flared up. He was sorry to have confided his troubles, had expected some little sympathy (this in bitterness of spirit). Of course she cared no longer for him; easy to see that; nothing to her if he should be forced to leave the regiment disgraced—in debt. Well, if she threw him over, all was over. He could always jump into Kingston harbor and let the sharks end him and his worries.

And so forth, lashing himself into very real wrath and grief. It seemed hours to Alice before, in anguish of spirit, she succeeded in soothing, in persuading him to be reasonable, to tell her more. Hopefully she whispered: "If it is not really much, dear one, perhaps I could——"

"Could you? Oh, you are a trump. It's only five hundred, darling. I'll repay you all right, you know——" laughing, though anxious.

"Five hundred. Oh, what a dreadful amount!" gasped Alice, her frugal mind dismayed.

Again a horrible silence. Then Clarence said with a choke: "You could raise it on this estate easily enough. Surely you don't persist in this mad idea of giving away half your property to that black brute of a Williamson."

"It is not mine—at least Two Rivers is not. In honor I am bound to restore it," came in pain.

"All right. I'm very, very sorry to have mentioned the matter at all. I'll write to the Mum. *She* would go without a new gown for a year to help me."

"So would I—for years. But only—Clarence, do listen!" Alice's voice was half drowned in sudden rare sobs. "I will do my best, and if I may consult Mr. Eglinton——"

"Bless you, my own girl, you are a real angel! But for your life don't tell Eggy. He'll let Eaglemont know. . . . Nonsense. I'll go with you to your lawyers, my pet. And let me warn you not to

trust your money matters to Eglinton. . . . Yes, he may be all right, as you think. But he is poor, and handling a girl's money who knows nothing of affairs is a temptation. By-the-way, I never liked to ask you exactly before. How much did your old uncle leave?"

Alice's reply was indistinct in her sobs. "The Grove—this estate. Oh, I hardly know yet—it's not all cleared up."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MEANTIME, Captain Blower, in the tone of a sea-surge in a cavern, was mildly taking Mrs. Dundas to task.

"Your ladyship gave us a little too much ear food at dinner, eh? What's that? Why, the niggers have a good proverb, 'Talk is de ear food.' When you and I spotted Master Clarence on cock-horse with his brown girl we settled to tell no tales and make no mischief."

"Oh, captain, it was naughty of me. Somehow, it just slipped out. Dear me! I am distressed. . . . Oh, no; the child doesn't hear us." (Then in a very high key), "Amabel, my love, I wonder, could you find the ammonia bottle on my dressing-table—the mosquitoes have raised two more lumps on my arms."

"Oh, botheration! Why will you be so vain and wear low sleeves, then, instead of covering up, like Alice!" moaned Tip, pertly, though going indoors, perhaps because Eglinton put her off his knee with decision. "My legs are just riddled with bites, but I don't complain."

As the little girl disappeared, Mrs. Dundas whispered, vivaciously: "Now we can talk freely. Mr. Eglinton, what do you think, that dear boy—at least, he was a dear boy—is sadly spoiled, isn't he? And I don't think it is nice of him, do you, taking up with that flouncing hayrake with her bluish nails—I noticed them at once—and the way she rolls her eyes, and her heels sticking out behind, at least I'm quite sure they do because she wears her dresses so trailing in everybody's way. Now, what do you say?"

But beyond a deep, rumbling laugh, answer from him addressed came there none.

"Ho, ho, ho! You're in form, Mrs. Dundas, to-night. Good company, ain't she, my Lord Eglinton," jovially commented the skipper. "But, come! That boy is not a bad chap, in my opinion. Only I wish I'd had the trainin' of him. . . . What 'ud I have done, madam? Why, laid into him now and again with a rope's end. Lord, I'd have made a man of him! He's a good enough sort, but been reared on broth too long by his mammy."

"That's just it," said Eglinton, breaking his silence. "After all, it is hard upon the lad having to suffer for his foolish upbringing."

Amabel was singularly long in finding the amonia, and when she did bring it, was as singularly silent. Even when she regained her now accustomed seat on Eglinton's knee, she neither teased him for a story about India nor bubbled over with duppy tales gleaned from Ambrosiana, who, like all

negroes, was utterly convinced that nobody ever died without becoming a more or less lively and troublesome ghost.

Presently a step came on the gravel path from beside the house. Clarence emerged alone from the shrubbery into the brilliant moonlight, and sauntered up to the rest.

"Miss Bamfield asked me to say good-night for her to everybody. She has a headache, and is gone to her room."

He spoke in so subdued a tone that every one inwardly jumped to the conclusion there had been a quarrel between the lovers. ("But they have made it up. There is such a confounded satisfaction underlying his manner," Eglinton savagely added to himself, with the sharpened insight of jealousy. And though he truly wished the lovers well, yet he writhed at the thought of how similar reconciliations generally take place.)

"Am I tiring you? I'm off," whispered Amabel, silently kissing his cheek. Ever since the skipper first boisterously insisted on his little friend bestowing a morning and evening salute upon her host, the child, of free will and in fairness, always turned to give William a yet more affectionate hug. He had grown in these few days to look for Tip's punctual caress: would miss it later on.

"Remember manners. You must say good-night to the others," he whispered back.

"Shan't," snapped Amabel, viciously: "I might

have to kiss *him*, and I'd rather bite him. He made her cry. I couldn't help hearing from Charlotte's room. Oh—an' I'm just aching inside to tell you what he said—but I mustn't."

"Quite right. Never repeat what you ought not to have heard. Good-night, little one."

CHAPTER XXXV.

CAPTAIN BLOWER kept so many ponies, buggies, and stable boys, that it was a simple matter for Alice to make her way alone into Kingston on the plea that she and Tip needed ball-frocks for the captain's party; and she had not thought of providing herself with any evening finery. Charlotte, hopeful woman, had brought all she possessed and more than she could pay for this year.

But it was less simple when, coming out of her lawyer's office, Alice found herself face to face with William Eglinton.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "Well met. Were you looking for me?"

"No," ejaculated Alice, setting her face like a flint, "I—was not. Were you coming to see Mr. Dunn on business?"

"No. I have no business with him except yours, whenever you wish me to look after any."

"Unless you call it business that he promised me his children would find me some humming-birds' nests for Amabel. But if he is busy that will do any day."

A voice so smooth as to be expressionless; that stroking of the beard she now knew so well in awkward situations. Another moment, and Eglinton, glancing down the street, observed :

"Ah! There is the Governor's carriage. If you don't mind my leaving you, I want to speak to him one minute."

"Don't go! One word with me first. You—you may wonder why I came here alone. It is nothing about Two Rivers, nor Carnegie Pen. I shall always consult you about them."

"No excuses are needed. Why should I expect you to tell me all your affairs—unless, indeed, I can be useful."

"But still——"

"Here is Plumtree. Good-day, Sir Nicholas. May I present Miss Bamfield, of whom you have heard as your new neighbor?"

And Alice found herself being kindly greeted by the great man of the island. As in a dream she heard him affectionately urging Eglinton to come soon again to the King's House and sleep a night or two. Gladly, answered the other with alacrity, only he was bound for the mountains two days hence. Then this evening. Sir Nicholas would take no refusal. It was fixed.

Next, Alice was courteously helped into her waiting buggy by William. Whilst she was struggling with the effort to say something—of explanation, not excuse—he raised his hat and turned away.

That afternoon they missed him at tea. Later on, he slipped into the house by the stables. At dinner his place was empty. Somehow, he seemed to have taken leave of the skipper, of Charlotte. Only not of Alice. At night Tip suddenly remarked: "Oh! I nearly forgot. My Mr. Eglinton asked me to say good-bye for him to you. He never forgets anybody." (This with secret satire, remembering Clarence's sin of omission a year ago.)

"Did he? I am glad to be remembered," said Alice, dully.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Two days of such steaming downpour from the heavens that the rain seemed an ever-descending dense shutter of moisture. Two long drawn days when Clarence, not caring to face the deluge, did not appear even for dinner. No living soul visited Carnegie Pen, excepting John Williamson, who drove over, sappy and shining-faced, with two baskets of fruit which he presented to Mrs. Dundas and Alice. Then he smiled broadly and dripped forth in haste, because "Mamma would be afraid he would take cold."

In regions downstairs, the skipper whistled, smoked, and whittled for hours, constructing models of irrigating canals for the sugar-cane fields out of bamboo stems and candle-boxes. "A man must be his own engineer to thrive here; and chemist as well," said he. Tip watched him till she grew bored, when she appeared upstairs hanging aimlessly round or fractious, when Alice set her to lessons.

Mrs. Dundas was mysteriously busied in her own room, everlastingly frilling up lace edgings and fallals, then trying their effect before the glass,

Alice never remembered feeling so solitary. Alone with her own perplexed thoughts; gnawing doubts; the small suspicions that (beat them down though she tried) still kept rearing their serpent heads. By night she fretted herself awake, by day she fretted herself drowsy. Without Eglinton's aid it had been so difficult to explain affairs to Mr. Dunn's comprehension. Eglinton had at his finger-tips all Alice could not remember as to succession duties and what moneys and when were due. Oh, it was maddening to be forbidden to consult her faithful helper! To have him thinking—what wrong might he not think?

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A THIRD morning, and behold a glad sun sparkling on glistening grass blades and the almost extinguished glow of crimson and scarlet flowers so lately prone and drenched. It was half past six as the Carnegie Pen inmates started for their visit to the mountains, and all felt their spirits revive in the deliciously cool morning air. Whilst Tip at her side chattered, Alice gazed round with renewed interest in the beautiful landscape, as after driving through the pleasant lanes she already knew, the road entered a wooded valley in the hills, winding into narrowing gorge. Below, the Hope river brawled in its rocky bed. Beyond, the steep mountain side was thickly clothed with tropical trees, studded with palms. Overhead hung beetling cliffs and forest giants, whilst cottages were niched in every nook.

Gordon Town is one of the loveliest mountain villages in the world. But Alice saw, unseeing, its rushing stream, and the houses nestling under cliffs or amongst gorgeous vegetation, whilst her eyes were eagerly watching for—— There! under a big

tamarind tree, a tall, bearded figure was waiting near a group of ponies and two pack mules. With sudden satisfaction the girl's glance at once turned aside. It was all right. Her best friend had not thrown them over; he was coming in spite of his huff.

"After all, though I love Clarence, it is natural to wish for the good opinion, the respect of this other man." So Alice assured her conscience. Not out of coquetry, not for love of power, but from sheer honest liking she must win him back this very morning to their old delightful intimacy. No shadow should remain between them unless that unlucky visit to Mr. Dunn——

"Hurry up! It looks like rain," called out Eglington, and he hastily helped Alice and Tip on two hill-hacks.

But Captain Blower stood still, his legs wide apart like a squat colossus.

"Right you are, sir; though you have not learned the signs of the weather here. As the niggers say, 'Tuddyraton is better than eddication.' Come, Mrs. Dundas, let the young people risk it. You and yours truly will stay in the dry. I have friends here will give us both breakfast and lunch. That lovely hat of yours mustn't be spoiled."

Charlotte demurred, even whilst glancing at a dark cloud-bank apprehensively. But her troubled objections about "no chaperon for these girls——" were quickly overborne.

Swinging himself into the saddle, Eglinton, who had asked the way already, plunged among the trees by a path that rose steeply in zig-zag up the face of the wooded cliffs. But before fifty yards the rain came down.

Such rain! It drove in streams through the thick foliage, lashing, blinding, soaking. For an hour and more, the whole world seemed a confusion of jungle and the Deluge. Through the green blur of leaves and water, Alice's smarting eyes only discerned the narrow path, and before her Tip's bent little person cantering unceasingly. At times, on a higher track, she caught a glimpse of Eglinton. It was giddy to look over the cliffsides. One seemed on the verge of an air-world vaporous with mists, into which the least stumble of the horses and they must be plunged.

"Oh! if any accident should happen to those two!" thought Alice, in keen anxiety. Why, why had she consented so obediently when Eglinton desired her to go last, which surely must be safest in case of mishap? Only the other night she had heard stories of riders falling over the "khud." Few of woman-kind could be less nervous as to her own safety. But he would meet danger first, if there were an earth-slip of the crumbling path.

At last! they came out on more open ground. On either side were intensely green depths into which vision plunged only to meet mists and emerging tree-tops. These vapor valleys formed rifts between a

hundred hill crests crowded round, their heads rising bare above the cloudland.

A cheering shout ahead. Eglinton was stopping on a level spot, pointing to a white house perched on the very summit of one hill-peak amongst its many brethren. Up, up, one last pull for the laboring ponies. Zig along a steep garden-path; zag on to a toy croquet ground. Mr. Wright's chirruping voice from a porch: "Here you are! Three human waterfalls, Bessie."

"Oh, my, my! You must change at once, my dears. I have dry clothes ready," clucked his dark-eyed, motherly little wife. "Or will you all go to bed till the baggage arrives, for this cool air often gives fever to people coming up from the heat of the plain."

But the visitors flouted her last kindly suggestion.

After breakfast appeared the mules with the luggage. Alice of course busied herself unpacking, besides making acquaintance with her hostess; whilst Amabel condescendingly patronized the Wright boys, who made a step-ladder of five, from below her in height upwards. Naturally enough the two men betook themselves to Wright's study all morning. It was not to be even expected—Alice cheerfully reasoned with herself—after siesta and afternoon tea, that they should invite her to join them in what Wright proposed as "a wade outside." For though before sunset the torrent ceased and the clouds rolled apart

in magnificent masses, yet trills poured from every leaf; the garden paths were running brooks; and cascades slid and slipped everywhere downhill between the glossy green coffee bushes and tree ferns unrolling coyly their furry clusters of youngest fronds.

"It makes me wish to have been born a man when one sees them going off like that, not minding the wet," said Miss Bamfield, wistfully looking out of the window at the two masculine figures, big-booted and gaitered, striding over the hill-edge out of her ken.

"Oh, do you think so? I quite pity my husband having to do rough work in all weathers," disagreed Mrs. Wright, daintily, glancing out with a shudder. "We'll have baby in to play with. And when your cousin comes, we'll have more tea. That will be ever so much nicer than getting our skirts dragged and our feet damp."

Alice chafed in spirit. How she longed to be tramping with those others and sniff the spicy fragrance of the wet bushes, and cry out, in admiration to Eglinton, over the glorious panorama. Well! still she could feast her eyes in part from the window on a brilliant bird's-eye view.

Yonder, beyond the tiny distant plain, lay Kingston bay, a blue sapphire ringed with snowy surf. And that far away green streak of savannah was near Spanish Town, where governors of various Georges once dwelt in state. That was when Jamaica was in its full glory of wealth, sugar, slavery

—all that has passed away like a dream. In the cathedral there Alice Carnegie lay buried; and later on Alice meant quietly to ask Mr. Eglinton to arrange a visit thither. For Clarence had gaily derided the idea: "Nothing to see, my dear girl! Only old bones and stones."

A stir outside. Captain Blower's voice uttering in a consoling bellow: "Now you are safe. Wipe your eyes, my dear lady. Here you are."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Wright. Oh, Alice, darling, such a dreadful ride! Yes, captain, here I am, indeed. But here I'll have to stay all the rest of my life. No; I could never, never face that awful path and those precipices again, and going downhill, too," lamented Mrs. Dundas with the moan of a dove. Her cheeks were a delicate pink and her blue eyes shining with something of the lustre of youth, while she dabbed a little moisture from their lashes.

"Ho, ho! She's been crying half the way up, and I've been walking by her side to keep up her courage," confided the captain with a grin to the others.

"You both seem to have been enjoying yourselves," said Alice bluntly, facing round from the window and regarding them with her keen young eyes. She was rather surprised that both looked somewhat confused.

Charlotte was too good a soul to take revenge. Yet she had it next minute for, looking round at Tip, she exclaimed in concern: "What's the matter with the child? Has she a touch of fever?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"Don't blame yourself, Miss Bamfield," chirped Mrs. Wright, soothingly. "After all, a young girl can't expect to have the experience of married women like your cousin and me. We'll make your little sister a bush-bed, and she'll be better to-morrow, you'll see."

And Alice, the former pillar of the house both at Biarritz and The Grove, writhed in silent self-indignation. But Tip, tossing upon a sack full of pounded leaves and sliced limes, with cinnamon bags moistened with brandy tied to her wrists, grew certainly less fretful, hour by hour, as Alice watched anxiously through the night. Towards dawn the little sufferer fell asleep and awoke at noon refreshed and cool.

"She is cured. I told you so," cheerfully announced the hostess.

"Yes. You need not have tormented yourself so, Alice," chimed in Mrs. Dundas. "It is just as well the men are gone off early for a long expedition, for you really look like a ghost. Mr. Eglinton was so

distressed about Amabel, too. He sent her his love this morning, and really he would not have gone at all only I assured him the child was doing nicely. And he inquired so kindly whether I had been too worried to sleep. He left her a message to be quite well when he returned to-morrow evening or the next day."

"To-morrow evening! What do you mean?"

"Oh, don't you know? Perhaps you were too occupied with Tip—but he and Mr. Wright settled to start for a two days' ride through the woods and hills."

"Well!—" breathed Alice, almost speechless with angered disappointment. "That *is* cavalier treatment. And from Mr. Eglington, of all men! It is a trifle that he never took the trouble to ask how I was—after sitting up all night. But to come up here on pretence of giving us his company, and then desert us—I call it too bad!"

Mrs. Dundas stared at this outburst, amazed. With a suddenly determined air, about as surprising as if a Dresden China shepherdess should part its lips to scold, she opened her blue eyes very wide, and spake:

"My dear Alice. You have chosen Clarence De Lacy for better for worse; and you cannot expect to have two men equally devoted. *Play the game fair!*"

Miss Bamfield in turn stared as if disbelieving her own ears. Had Tip, or the Wright baby, taken her seriously to task it would hardly have seemed

more ridiculous. Cousin Charlotte—who was always set aflutter by a man's hat in the hall—Charlotte who never had, nor now ever would learn wisdom, to impute to Alice (of all girls!) any unlawful desire for masculine admiration. The accused one made the most withering answer possible. She preserved awful silence.

"Dear! dear! Oh, don't be offended," entreated Charlotte, at once lapsing into feebleness. "And—I forgot, of course—I mean, of course, Mr. Eglinton did ask after you. Yes; now, what did he say? He hoped you were pretty well, and asked to be remembered to you." She was fibbing at haphazard; the fact being that William Eglinton really left a friendly message, to which Mrs. Dundas paid no attention in the giddy excitement of seeing Captain Blower hoist himself on his pony. For the skipper could not be persuaded to stay away longer from his beloved Pen. He declared, however, he was mainly returning to make preparations for the dance.

Betaking herself and her swelling heart out into the hill-garden, Alice looked with burning eyeballs north and south, east and west, round the horizon. But what to her, now, the strange spectacle of innumerable hills that crowded round, crinkled and dimpled, recalling the saying of Columbus, "Jamaica is like a crumpled parchment"? What, that these hill-crests, exquisite in coloring as a poet's dream, were rising out of mists? So that the young, graceful figure standing there alone was surrounded by

layers of vapor veils alternating with grassy ridges dotted with spice bushes.

It was an upper world set apart between sky and cloudland. And Alice saw and knew that it was fair beyond all imagination—but she felt alone. Roses and balsams were blowing near the squat discs of sago palms. But there was no one to listen to her conceit that these, with their bulbous stems, looked like the heads of giant Indian chiefs rising from the ground in their war-plumes.

Here were tall crimson dracaenas, azaleas of all shades, and white spider-lilies that had sprung up and blossomed in the night. Humming-birds hovered around bushes of blue tube-like flower, while further were red and white poinsettias, and hibiscus, crimson, pink or ruby. Besides, loveliest of all—a plant Alice hung over in ignorant admiration, its leaves of soft plush, in hue a rich Tyrian purple shot with emerald green. And in the background, as if of no account, rose orange-trees golden with fruit, splendid lemons, star-apples, and rose-apples.

Yes, this day and the next Alice felt more solitary than even those two wet days of late. Then, she buoyed herself with hopes of rambles over the hills in pleasant companionship and renewed friendliness. Now, reality faced her.

Tip was racing and chasing all day with the Wright children. Mrs. Dundas and Mrs. Wright sat together by the hour, tatting and knitting, whilst they exchanged unending confidences. Sometimes

Alice caught snatches about Tommy's teething, and Baby's dislike of milk puddings. Another time, coming on them unawares, she overheard Mrs. Wright saying: "Yes: I wish we could get you nicely settled, my dear. But the captain is such a confirmed old bachelor, I fear you are wasting your time. Best make up your mind to try the other chance."

"Perhaps so—but he is so *dark*," sighed Charlotte. Then startled—"Ah, here is Alice. Strong-minded girl! She always has loved to ramble about alone."

But it was a weak-minded Alice Bamfield who, with shrinking soul, became aware in those solitary hours of a certain suspicion.

At first she thrust it away. Out, out; it must not be harbored a moment. Only a thought such as this will not go. It stayed—it grew.

"Oh, I am dishonorable! Unfaithful!" she moaned in her heart. Again: "It cannot be." Nevertheless, on the second afternoon she knew it was true, for at last she forced herself almost shuddering to face and think this thing out. She was alone, as usual, on a lonely hill-path. Below, the steep khud (so hillsides are called in Jamaica, as in India) was one luxuriant tangle. Above, hung beautiful forest trees, of which these last days she had often wished to learn the names. On the bank at her side sprouted gold ferns and silver air plants and flowers like pinkish lace. Far, far down, clouds were floating over the valleys like bluish smoke-wreaths; and the green

and the grey were so weirdly blended that the lonely human being felt as in a strange, enchanted world, now dissolving, now reappearing.

But stung by this appalling self-discovery, Alice saw, unheeding. Her feet strayed on and on mechanically, till they rang on a deserted stone barbecue, surrounded by high coffee bushes. Then, seeing she was secure from interruption, the girl flung herself down, sobbing bitterly :

"Charlotte was right—after all! What shall I do? What ought I to do? . . . Oh, poor Clarence! I never loved him really, it was only my vanity—only that it seemed sweet then to be kissed and praised. And now, if I desert him, he will sink deeper and deeper in debt. . . . I might save him, for he does care for me, and I can be strong for us both. . . . Only, what a future of misery for me! Still, if it is right, I must keep my word. And—*no one else cares!*"

What was that pelting sound; now it was hissing? Raising her tear-wet face Alice was stung with rain-drops. A sudden hill shower was lashing the open clearing, and its occupant hastily fled to a thicket of bamboos. Parting these to seek closer lair, she spied a negro hut a few yards distant, over-shadowed by two poinsettias so glowing with flower, they seemed verily burning bushes. Ah! that was better shelter.

"Marnin', my sweetie missus," muttered a voice from the hearth, as Alice stood hesitating on the threshold. An old negress, half naked, raised a face

wrinkled, cunning, and aged beyond any the girl ever remembered seeing, and peered out of beady eyes. Then the crone pointed to a dirty stool. "Buckra* missus always sit down. . . . Glory be, I saw good days! Me slave once—down at Carnegie Pen. Ah! Glory." Cringing and fawning in a revolting manner, the old woman crawled nearer and held out a skinny hand for alms.

Alice felt glad she had not much silver in her purse, but that she emptied generously. A singular change came over the negress's aged face as she clasped the coins. The evil and greed in her eyes changed to wondering satisfaction.

Still squatting on the floor, she half whispered: "Dat lubly hair all gold yes de same what came in my dream las' night. . . . Don' cry, chile," gazing keenly at Alice's blistered eyes. "Buckra ossifer boy no good fe marry. Ebber see empty bag tan up? Yellow snake an' fowl no com-partner. Sweetie missus marry big buckra; him plenty money, house big as King's House. Dat fe true."

When Alice told that evening of the incident, Mrs. Wright cried out:

"Goodness! That was old Indiana, the Obi witch. Everyone shuns her for fear of her doing them an ill-turn. Did she tell your fortune? For she has the strangest gift of second-sight, and often what she prophesies comes true."

* White.

"She talked of having been happy as a slave. And that I could not believe," replied Alice, evasively.

"Who knows? They say she was a noted beauty in her youth, and used to lead the 'setts' of slave girls that danced through Kingston in the old merry-making days. But Obi is no laughing matter. The Obi doctors sell charms to servants to make massa or missus lub them, and it may be vegetable poison or powdered glass. My aunt was quite ill in this way only because she 'did tell her maid a bad word—careless!' The girl got frightened and owned this was why she had put something in auntie's coffee. But you were safe. You carry a little cross on your watch chain, and all the Obi people dread that as a stronger charm than their own magic."

"Yes; she saw I had a cross," returned Alice, with an odd smile.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was dark on the Saturday evening when the cheerful voices of the returning men were heard outside. The fireflies were out and the bats or "pat-hooks" sweeping round. Alice stood among the waiting children, her white dress easily seen against the reddish path rising steeply behind.

"You remind me of a saint's image seen by home-bound mariners. I guessed it was you from far down there," said William Eglinton, with a hearty handshake, in his pleasant tones.

(How pleasant they were! thought Alice. And how foolish to have made herself unhappy these past days, thinking her best friend was offended. Voice and clasp were the same, just the same.)

"Well, and how have you been getting on?" went on Eglinton, cordially, at dinner, addressing Alice. "What a pity you could not have come with us! I thought several times how you would have enjoyed it. But it was too rough work and too fatiguing for a lady, though I shall always be glad to have seen all we did."

"Yes, and Jamaica may be very glad some day you did see it," put in Wright, nodding with a serious air. "Sir Nicholas Plumtree did a good deed when he persuaded you to undertake this job. If you succeed in getting the home government to send out a commission of inquiry as to how we poor planters can be helped, and to start the island industries afresh, you will be a benefactor, indeed. Hundreds will bless your name!"

"Softly, my dear Wright. The plan may fail for lack of my ability. If even it succeeds that may not be for some years. Our mills at home grind slowly," deprecated Eglinton in manly though modest fashion. And, as we know, his latter prophecy came true.

"Fail! Not through you. In all my life I have seldom or never met any man who could master his subject so readily with such a good grip of the situation—who was both so clear and broad-minded. And I say so to your face without flattery," enthusiastically declared the Director of Woods and Forests.

"What is this undertaking? You never told me a word about it," murmured Alice, unconscious reproach in her tone; turning to Eglinton, who sat beside her.

"It is a new thing. It arose from something Plumtree said when he was deploring the decline of Jamaica the other night. There is a great deal to be looked into and learned, of course, so I shall be kept very busy for the next three weeks or so till my

return to England. But the work is tremendously interesting."

(Till he returned—in three weeks. The words fell plump into Alice's mind, heavy as lead. Strange! She had never yet realized that naturally her counsellor and trusted friend must leave some day. But this seemed so soon.)

Later on, whilst there was a buzz of general talk, Eglinton was surprised to hear a stifled murmur from his neighbor.

"You will try—at least—to be present the night of full moon. You know—for the digging."

"Certainly. I always try to keep my promises. So do you."

Alice was singularly silent that evening as they made a circle round the hearth, on which cedar and juniper branches luxuriously blazed, for at nights the mountain air was cool.

But no one noticed the girl's silence excepting one. And he only attributed it to the fact that she was a good listener.

Whilst Mr. Wright had an inexhaustible fund of information concerning Jamaica, this night his theme was the gentle savages whom Columbus found inhabiting Xaymaca, the isle of springs. Amongst other details of their curious arts the host told how they would go afishing in a huge dug-out with a remora, or hunting-fish, tethered to the canoe, having a line in reserve of many fathoms' length. Whenever the remora darted after a likely quarry, the line was

loosed. But a buoy at its end showed where the finish had taken place, far down in the intensely clear water amongst the coral reefs. Then the fishermen, following, hauled up their line with the remora tenaciously grasping its prey.

CHAPTER XL.

ALICE imagined herself the only one of the Blackberry Hill household bent on early service that Sunday morning. The little church was at some distance, and the sun almost too hot soon after seven o'clock, as she hastened along the mountain path fringed with a tropical growth so richly green, so prodigal in its varied profusion, it surpassed the wildest flights of her imagination, nursed in sober northern scenery. Entering the tiny church she was surprised to catch a sight of William Eglinton already seated in the chancel.

With quick modesty, not to lay herself open to the charge, even self-imputed, of "running after him," Alice slipped into a seat near the door, among a crowd of dark worshippers, and buried her face in her hands. Raising her head presently she found herself an object of whispered comment amongst various elderly negresses, who wore broad summer hats perched on their red-turbaned heads. In spite of this ludicrous effect, their faces were singularly devout, for religious devotion is one of the most striking traits of colored folk.

One next Alice, a sweetly serious old woman,

whose pink bandana was topped by a battered Leghorn hat, all awry, with draggled feathers, gently whispered to the stranger: "Go up higher, me love. De buckras (white people) has sats in de chancel." So, finding she was contradicting the island custom, Alice obeyed, and was ushered to a place beside William, who made room mechanically, being engrossed in private meditation. They were early, so once or twice Alice stole a furtive look at the rugged featured, strong countenance with its deep-set eyes, that seemed so kindly, lonely! His look as of sleeping power ready to rouse at any call upon his aid. How good he was! No private cares, that was clear from his upward glance, disturbed his mind. In the house of prayer he was wholly giving up his thoughts to his Creator's praise, was asking gifts of his Father. Would that she might in time do likewise, profiting by this example! And sore-hearted though she still was, Alice found herself soothed, uplifted in soul, silently shown how to be comforted by the friendly presence so near. It might be, as some believe, that from each of us proceeds an effluence strongly impregnated by our thoughts. And this atmosphere, good or bad, affects those near us. If this be so, then the man who silently coupled the girl by his side with himself in asking blessings—blessings of patience, hope, courage in their future life apart—influenced her mind by unspoken communications.

It was not until the sermon had got to its "sec-

only," that William's attention wearied, and then in turn his eyes sought his neighbor's fair face with caution. He was going away soon; it was so strong a temptation to look at her a little—whilst he yet could. That sweet, resolved mouth; those eyes like little orbs cut from a summer sky. Ah! his heart tightened with pain, at thought that they might grow saddened and old before—if ever—his eyes saw them again, after an approaching farewell, that he dared not long delay. He had finished his work helping the orphan girl. To stay longer would be worse than useless for himself; already he had stored up pain more than enough. But how pale she was in spite of the mountain air. An unmistakable sadness dimmed the young creature's former brightness. Alas! Her feet were set on a path where at every step his aid could avail her less. He sighed deeply; and Alice started, looked round. But Eglinton seemed gazing abstractedly into space.

In an exalted frame of mind, quieted and comforted, they two went slowly home, climbing the steep paths. Pausing to rest on a fallen log, Alice exclaimed with pleasure on seeing a tangle of honeysuckle and yellow home gorse behind them. Then William showed her close by the white aromatic blossoms of wild ginger.

The sound of horses' feet came round a corner. A pony appeared, with its owner, Clarence De Lacy, stretching his legs on foot behind and, careless as usual, not holding the bridle.

"Hal—lo! You two here, alone? May I inquire, Mr. Eglinton, what this means? You are aware that this lady is engaged to me?" was Clarence's morning greeting. His face flushed hot; his tone was that of smouldering hostility bursting into angry flame. "And you—Alice! Is this proper conduct?" He paused, speechless with indignation. Then as Alice sprang up to appease him, with outstretched hand and conciliatory word, he stepped back in dudgeon, and——

A cry; three voices mingled. Clarence had slipped over the cliff. His face, white as ashes, showed on a level with the path, and his hands grasped at some plants that were cracking—giving——. Another moment, and William Eglinton had thrown himself prone on the ground with one arm round a tree, the other flung under Clarence's shoulders. Alice seemed to see the whole in the same flash, and knew, even as Clarence's nails dug desperately into the soil, that Eglinton's arm was slipping from the tree. He, too——

Then she found herself gripping one stirrup that dangled from the pony, her other hand clutching that of Clarence, while she gave a hoarse shriek. Off started the startled animal. The impetus seemed almost to wrench the girl's arm from its socket. But with a scramble and a heave De Lacy got one knee up; was hauled over the edge; was saved.

Tenderly, as if the youth were a beloved younger brother, William Eglinton supported him to the log,

signed to Alice to move away, whilst poor Clarence buried his face in his hands, trembling. A little later a very quiet group slowly returned to Blackberry Hill. Clarence, chastened and docile as an infant, rode the pony, for he was too shaken to walk. Again and again he faltered his gratitude to both his preservers: he would never forget it; never! Still more humbly he begged their pardon for his hasty ill-temper, was ashamed when they gave the reason for their chance companionship.

During that quiet Sunday morning William and Alice kept apart as if by mute agreement. But the latter found Clarence always at her side. On the first opportunity of being alone he embraced her twice, brokenly whispering his love, with fond, self-pleased assurance that because his "dear little girl had been so good about that beastly debt," he determined, in reward, that "nothing and nobody" should tempt him to forego paying her a Sunday visit. His first caress Alice received willingly, her lover was so like a penitent child, nay, almost eagerly——. Might not his kiss bring back the old feeling, the tender joy and surprise of her first love? But the second time it needed all the girl's self-restraint not to repulse Clarence. A wave of disgust at what she impatiently thought mawkish emotion surged up within her breast.

("Now I can understand why Mary Stuart loathed her boy-husband, Darnley," shot through Alice's brain. Next instant, she was horror-

stricken. She did not loathe her sunny-tempered sweetheart. Far, far from that. She only wished he would grow more manly soon, leave off puling lover-ishness, which to her matter-of-fact mind was foolishness.)

By luncheon-time more guests arrived unexpectedly, Captain Blower and the Williamsons, mother and son. They fell in with each other on the uphill path, but seemed likely, as Eglinton privately observed to Wright, to fall out on the downward way back.

Mrs. Dundas was the elderly siren to blame. Resting with a lingering grace in her hammock she had inveigled Blower to smoke on one side, whilst Williamson flapped a large fan on the other, to keep off mosquitoes. Between them she divided her smiles—one-third to the skipper, the rest to the brown-skinned John. Blower did not understand this manoeuvre. He grew grumpy, then glum; his answers to the lady became grunts, but to Williamson growls. Undismayed, Mrs. Dundas hammocked and prattled with ever growing sprightliness.

A squib was thrown into the scene by Tip, who came racing, with all the boys at her heels, to announce:

"Here is that Miss Fitzwilliam prancing up the hill, with two officer gentlemen I've seen parading about the streets in Kingston."

There was a general chorus of dismayed interjections. Clarence looked uncomfortable, conscious, as he muttered:

"Silly girl! She tried to persuade me into going up to Newcastle yesterday, where she was asked for a regimental sing-song. I refused, but said in a joke if she came round here I would ride down with her. She has taken me at my word."

So, thought Alice, there is different sauce for the goose and the gander. Her eyes turned towards her companion in accusation that morning. At the same moment Eglinton looked at her, and each knew the same thought was in their minds.

Mrs. Dundas murmured pettishly to her two admirers: "How tiresome! Just when we were having a nice quiet Sunday afternoon."

"Well, you and I need not budge," said the skipper.

"No; we three need not budge," cheerfully added Williamson, like an Irish echo.

CHAPTER XLI.

PYRETHA did not receive a warm greeting from anyone, excepting the hosts, who were proverbially cordial. But she swam forward so brimming with patronizing smiles and what Eglinton called feminine swagger that she perceived no lack of satisfaction on the part of other persons.

When the enlarged circle closed again, Williamson, uplifted in heart by the smiles which Mrs. Dundas played upon him, was emboldened to call out: "Cousin Pie, were you warbling over at Newcastle last night?" Looking round the company: "My cousin has a voice like a church organ." There was a feeling of general surprise among those listeners who were not Jamaican born and bred, which Pyretha, perceiving, answered loftily:

"Please do not call me cousin in that old-fashioned style. It sounds so ridiculous. I might just as well call Miss Bamfield there, cousin. We can all trace back to the same stem, of course; but——" glancing round carelessly at her soldier friends, "that was generations ago."

Alice, who supposed this was a daring allusion

to the old planter Bamfield and Rintinella, a story she did not relish being told there and then, glanced helplessly at Eglinton, whose demeanor silently counselled silence.

John's jaw fell at the snub, but he broke into a hurt expostulation:

"What about the proverb, 'When man no done climb hill, him should neber trow 'way him stick.'"

"And there is another, 'Softly ribber run deep.' So do stop chattering," interrupted Pyretha, this time with right-down rudeness. "Let us listen. Is that your mother singing a hymn indoors to the children? Shall we join in? Come, Miss Bamfield, if you have a voice let us hear it." And Pyretha, with remarkably sudden change of mien, rolled her fine eyes skywards, folded her hands and burst into full-throated strains. Alice felt it was the challenge of a rival. She hesitated—but only for a moment or so. Then she quietly joined her mediocre but correct robin-notes, drowned, whelmed in Pyretha's flood of ever more triumphant song.

Indoors, Mrs. Williamson soon ceased her sedate chanting. The children whom she had gathered in a Sunday class were distracted hopelessly in their attention by hearing their elders. It was a relief to those left behind when Pyretha later departed with her train; Clarence as her chosen cavalier by her side.

Immediately afterwards William Eglinton put a question that was burning Alice's tongue.

"By the way, Williamson, is Miss Fitzwilliam a near cousin of yours?"

"First cousin, Mr. Eglinton; her father and mine were twin brothers; yes, sir. But Uncle Shadrach changed his name when he married, to please aunt. That's all; that's all!" And honest John ineffectually tried to be withering.

"Then, pray, how is your cousin, Pyretha, connected with my ancestors, the Carnegies, as she claims to be from her second name?" demanded Alice, in a severe tone.

"Ho, ho, ho! Mamma, do you hear? That is fun!" grinned John.

"It is wrongful dealing," said his mother, regretfully. "Often have I told Pyretha the story, when she seemed to be puffed up about her grand names. When her mother wished the infant called Pyretha, its father Shadrach had a fancy for Penelope. And John, here, like a thoughtless boy, called out Pyretha Pen—why you might as well call her Carnegie Pen. The joke took Shadrach's fancy, so the babe was christened Pyretha Carnegie Penelope."

"And that is all——?" Alice opened her eyes wide at the audacity of her rival.

After a few minutes she rose abruptly and left the group. Eglinton's eyes followed her; in a quarter of an hour he could resist an inner call no longer. His steps followed his glance, where she had been lost to sight down the hill-garden. Pres-

ently he came upon the girl gazing over a rail into the green gorge below. Before he could utter the excuses already framed for intruding upon her meditation, she looked round and said, in a mechanical way:

"Thank you for coming. I wanted to consult you. Perhaps you knew——"

"I thought it possible. About this Fitzwilliam girl being a co-heiress with Williamson? I am afraid she is so; and you don't like her.

"What matter for that? Only—I shall be glad to get the whole business over. When do you think it could be done at the soonest?" Alice began in a tone of forced indifference, almost contempt, yet the last question came like a cry of impatience.

Within herself she had been reiterating, "Jealous. No; I am not that. But let her have her share of the treasure, and see what will happen. That will be the best. I am weary."

William pulled out his pocketbook and showed her a calendar. "The night after the captain's dance. I marked it for you. Between whiles I shall have just time to go over to Moneague." Then, as Alice looked at him, silently asking, "Going away again?" he explained in a subdued voice, as if feeling reproached, "Yes. Naturally St. Anne's Parish has to be visited on this quest of mine. It comes in the day's work, and they tell me it is the loveliest scenery in Jamaica. It is a pity!—— You

could not all come, too, I suppose? Perhaps it would not do."

That last was a slip of the tongue. Alice's spirit rose, and the woman's tongue, which is afire, blazed up like tinder light.

"Why not? Yes; let us all go. We will! If I cannot do as I please now, under Charlotte's chaperonage, I never shall."

Undoubtedly true. And she was right not to give in to Clarence's unfairness, as if owning to have been in the wrong. So Eglinton silently argued, yet he felt slightly ashamed of the rush of gladness in his mind following that swift indignant decision.

"All right. But where will your party put up? Williamson insists I am to stay at his house, which Wright tells me is fairly comfortable for bachelor quarters, but I fancy would be rough for you ladies. There is a good hotel—but Williamson is sure to invite you all. Mrs. Dundas and he seem great friends."

This was significantly said. Alice looked at him in dismay.

"That would never do. We will go to the hotel. That is settled."

"Williamson is very fairly well off, so Wright tells me," went on Eglinton, in an unconcerned manner. "One is glad to think that at all events he and his father increased their fortune honorably. For in Dunn's report, which I forwarded to you when I was staying at the King's House, you read that he can find no flaw in their honesty."

"I read it. Yes; and was glad. But—I wish Captain Blower could be persuaded to come with us."

"Ha! A good idea! I'll try to arrange that."

Eglinton kept his word, and succeeded before the skipper departed.

"Want me! I'm not wanted by anybody. What, eh? Get along all right the lot of you without the old boy," was his testy answer.

"We all want you. Come, Blowhard, don't let Williamson think he has cut you out. Besides, if I stay with him, I shall be glad if you would look after our ladies."

"Hum! There is something in that," assented the captain.

CHAPTER XLII.

BEYOND wooded valleys, exceeding rich, and wooded hills sloping high, across the island from Kingston lies a land of rich grass, dimpled with dales and knolls that might be Westmoreland. Yes; those green pastures fenced by loose stone walls lichened from age, the free sweet air blowing in one's face, surely seem English. Look again. The fond illusion is lost in a richer reality. For the red cattle are grazing shoulder deep in guinea grass, and yonder cow apart stands chewing her cud meditatively near an orange-grove, heavy with golden balls. Lilac blossoms of anatto enliven the hedges, whilst that merry-faced yellow creeper, "Black-eyed Susan," with its shining, dark heart, never flaunted saucily on sober northern soil.

Some six miles seawards, and eight hundred feet lower, there lies a narrow gorge trending steeply downwards between cliffs so shaded by trees and massed with undergrowth that it is famed as the Fern Gully. Beautiful it is. But only when emerging from this does the ravishing beauty of St. Anne's bay strike one as a revelation—a new glory of earth.

"Oh, I never dreamed of a scene like this," exclaimed Alice, in an undertone of rapture. Then turning to her companion: "You are travelled. Have you ever seen its like?"

"Never a sea so gorgeous. It is unrivalled of its kind," answered Eglinton, as entranced as herself.

The sea beyond the purple coral reefs was of living sunlit sapphire, nearer a palest green, so transparent one could see the fish far below. It rippled on a dazzling strand of broken coral, whiter than snow. And this gleamed through hundreds of palm fronds fringing the steep declivity on one side of the road. The other side was shaded by wooded hillsides; made melodious by hidden streams. What vivid greens and blues, what burning velvet reds and scarlets of flowers, hot sun-gleams alternating with umbrageous coolness!

A mile or so inland from Ocho Rios village the Roaring River waterfall leaps from sunlight above down among tree-tops, dissolving in white smoke-like spray.

It proved a hot walk thither through glades where the sun was grilling, and even under the trees the moist air was warm exceedingly.

Alice and Eglinton had out-tripped Mrs. Dundas, who was easily exhausted, and even Tip flagged behind.

"Do you remember how the 'water comes down at Lodore'? This reminds me of it," and William quoted the well-known lines.

To his surprise, the girl, who generally entered into all his moods so companionably, only gave a vague assent. Then, in a low tone of almost painful eagerness, she asked :

"May I speak to you about something very private? You may not have noticed it, but this is the first time we have been alone since the Sunday up in the Blue Mountains."

(The man winced. Did he not know it?—too well.)

"I could not ask your advice sooner. Amabel is always hanging on your arm. It vexes me often that she teases you so."

"Do not mind that. I would stand many more of the child's whims for the sake of her affection. To a lonely being like myself it means more than you can guess. But, now, in what can I advise?"

"It is——" Alice choked over the words—"that . . . ever since that last Sunday at Blackberry Hill, when Pyretha Fitzwilliam came . . . you remember . . . I feel as if I could not keep my promise."

"What! *You* break your word?" William felt deeply shocked. He showed it.

"Oh, don't look like that! Do not you speak so severely. I can't bear it! You don't know—a man cannot guess how hard it is on a woman, on a girl like me," burst out Alice, brokenly in passion, turning away her head to hide the great tears rising against her will. "It may—it will ruin my whole

life; at least my happiness, if I must go on with it."

"I do know; I can guess. But oh, my dear girl, be brave. What—tears? May I call you by your name, Alice; we are such good friends."

Alice drew a startled breath, and said low:

"Yes—do."

"Then, Alice, oh, my dear, forgive me for hurting your feelings, but I implore and pray you to struggle against this temptation. Alice, take courage; be your own honorable self, Alice." William was babbling her name over and over, the new privilege was so sweet to him.

"I will try. But it is your doing, remember, not mine." The words left Alice's lips with despairing violence; and turning sharply aside she made her way alone among water rills meandering about the tree-roots. And Eglinton, rightly judging she needed to be alone, stayed behind and made pretence to show the waterfall to the others as they straggled up hot and tired.

That day he was destined to hear more confidences. On the way back, Mrs. Williamson gently contrived to draw him apart and began speaking of John.

"He is my only son and I am a widow. So perhaps you will understand, Mr. Eglinton, how I have cherished the hope that he would marry some day, and that his children would be set in my lap. There is a young girl, of whom I have thought; nice and quiet—a Sunday-school teacher, too. Until lately he has fancied his cousin, Pyretha, which was a se-

cret trial to me, I will confess. And now he thinks Mrs. Dundas so elegant—But there! What ought to be will be. And you blame me, perhaps, for my anxious mother's heart."

"By no means," said Eglinton, heartily. "On the contrary, what you propose seems to me the very best thing in the world for Williamson; and let us hope it will come true."

Next morning the young Grove heiress and her party left the comfortable Moneague hotel, which is not unlike a small English country house set on a grassy knoll. Eglinton joined them early, driven over regretfully by Williamson from the latter's pen; a grassy estate and roomy if bare house set on a peak among bosky tree-clumps. Captain Blower looked ruddily radiant, for these last few days not once had he allowed his rival the chance of a few minutes' talk alone with the middle-aged though comely object of their joint admiration. In this it must be said, that the others silently aided and abetted the skipper's determination.

So, bidding a cordial good-bye to John till he should return to his Two Rivers bungalow for the coming dance, the others started at nine o'clock for a twenty-nine miles' drive to Spanish Town, in order to pass through the celebrated Bog Walk. This is the glen of the Rio Cobre; and for about six miles they enjoyed as lovely wooded cliffs and as blue a rushing river as can be seen anywhere on earth. Then, as the October sun grew too hot and the road

tame and shadowless, they approached the ancient capital of the island.

Not another word on the subject of their last interview did Alice interchange with her counsellor. She looked wistful, and felt sad; but there was almost a bitter pleasure in the thought, deep hidden in her heart, that, if she indeed braced herself to prospective martyrdom, it was at the wish and bidding of William Eglinton.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AND now an event occurred which deserves a chapter, however short, to itself. It chanced amongst the decayed glories of Spanish Town, generally described reverentially by born Jamaicans as "really old." After resting during the afternoon in the hotel, that was cool and fairly large, our party forsook its cane rocking-chairs and polished floors to inspect the sights of the ancient capital, which had the lingering pleasantness of some places, like persons, that have kept better company in their day.

A waiter condescendingly advised them, "Go to the cathedral, and the beagle will show you the monyiments." So thither they strolled, past dilapidated garden fences and ancient villas. Inside the old edifice, plain enough, but with time-hallowed grave slabs along its aisles, Alice betook herself to searching for the monument of her ancestress, Alice Carnegie. Tip inadvertently helped to find this by dragging at William's hand, which she never once let go since they started on their walk. "Look, Mr. Eggy, at this fat little boy with a wreath, who is leap-frogging over a tea-urn."

"Amabel's criticism of bygone art is scathing," re-

marked her chosen comrade to Alice; "but here seems a charming bas-relief; a female figure worthy of Flaxman. What do you think of it?" He smiled to himself as Alice exclaimed in recognition:

"Why, this is it! Mrs. Wright told me it was modelled by a young sculptor who had been in love with Alice Carnegie, and did this from memory."

William had purposely allowed her to think she first saw the inscription: a small thing, but it is the sum of such trifles in life that give happiness.

Meantime, the captain and Mrs. Dundas were left together. And as the latter afterwards assured her friends truthfully, she "was not thinking of anything" when looking round she remarked, with faint regret: "As a girl, I always wished to be married in a cathedral, but I wasn't."

"Never say die. Now's your chance. Here you are and here is the cathedral," promptly answered Blower.

"But he, he! The bridegroom," simpered she.

"Why, yours truly," said he, slapping his breast.

"Oh, thank goodness! You are not too late," uttered Charlotte, with impulsive simplicity.

"It's a bargain, then. I thought as much," gaily whispered the captain, diving in his pockets and producing a case with a ruby ring, which he at once popped on Charlotte's hand, that chanced to be ungloved.

"Dear me! You did make certain," uttered the lady, mildly provoked though wholly delighted.

"Nothing like it," said Blower, coolly, slapping his pockets again. "And here is the clincher!" This elegantly described a really fine diamond star which he proudly displayed in the hollow of his large hand.

Charlotte's blue eyes grew wet in her emotion.

"What lavish generosity! Really, it seems too much—for only me, so faded, and—and—middle-aged."

"You're an autumn rose," quoth her elderly lover, gallantly. "Yes: women like roses will bloom twice if they only get sunshine enough. And, please God, I'll try and make things happy for you, my dear."

CHAPTER XLIV.

It was a pleasure to witness the innocent triumph and gaiety that, bubbling up in Charlotte Dundas's heart, overflowed in smiles as she received *her* guests on the night of the dance. Captain Blower by her side introduced everyone to her, adding emphatically: "Lady of the house for this night and in future." Besides, she looked "a picture," as her skipper admiringly declared. Wearing a rose-colored brocade, which for worlds she would not have revealed had been the careless gift of a rich relation, trimmed with her former wedding veil, and flounces by her own skilful fingers, the Mid-Victorian beauty now resembled a Gainsborough Dame. In her white hair, puffed up and slightly powdered, she had fastened a knot of black velvet holding her precious diamond star. "I'll leave it to you in my will, Alice, darling," Charlotte impulsively declared when the girl admired it this evening, "for after all I owe all this to you." And the long-dulled blue eyes sparkled almost as in youth.

"Upon my word I feel quite envious of my friend Blower," was Eglinton's amused homage.

"Oh, come!" Charlotte tapped him playfully with her fan. "Compliments from you! Well, wonders will never cease. And you are so—so transmogrified! Your beard so nicely trimmed like poor King Charles, and your hair cut. Dear, dear, so rude of me to make personal remarks; but you really look quite noble to-night. Does he not, children?" appealing to Alice and Amabel. The latter hopped, exclaiming:

"It was my doing. I told him he ought to, because——"

"Hush, little one, no tales out of school," warned her big friend. Then with a hearty laugh: "She scolded me, and she was right."

Alice looked down troubled. She had remarked once to Tip, "What a pity our good Eggy does not take more pride in his appearance. He would be very good-looking if he only would." The child could not have betrayed her. But Charlotte, though silly, spoke the truth. He did look noble.

With an inward envy of her cousin's simple happiness Alice glanced involuntarily at Clarence, who stood near. At the skipper's request to "brighten up the room a bit," De Lacy and the other officers present wore undress uniform, and he never looked better than now in his white mess jacket and crimson silk sash.

"Hullo!" said the latter approaching with displeasure, pouting his cherubic lip: "How's this? I supposed you and I were going to open the ball, so I

claimed the first valse. Now the skipper has some foolery about starting with lancers to 'please Mrs. Dundas. Who are you dancing it with? Not Eglinton——" this jealously.

"No. Only Mr. Williamson, as my agent. Tip, of course, claimed her Mr. Eggy. But will you not join our set? Do—and I should like Mrs. Wright to be one of us."

"Why not me?" interrupted Pyretha. She had come up close, listening with what her enemies termed her usual effrontery. In a daring yellow dress, made gorgeous by touches of nasturtium orange, she now looked down patronizingly upon her smaller rival with really splendid insolence. "Mr. De Lacy, I'll dance it with you, if it's a family affair. Miss Bamfield and I can call each other cousins. There is my ancestress," pointing to the portrait of Alice Carnegie, beneath which they stood.

"Certainly not! My ancestress—but not yours," said Alice, in clear tones. It was a severe rebuke, "but the girl deserved it" was the general verdict of those around who understood the passage of arms.

Pyretha revenged herself in the lancers by a giggling carelessness, greatly annoying to Mrs. Dundas, who looked upon the dance as almost a betrothal ceremony between herself and her captain. She petulantly remarked to the latter: "What disruption that pair make!" For Clarence, vexed at not being honored by dancing with Alice opposite the host and hostess, was infected by Pyretha's bad man-

ners. "Get on, sonny," the skipper admonished the youth in vain, who was standing still chatting to his partner. All on a sudden, quiet William Eglinton rolled out in a tone of good-humored thunder, "*Laisser aller!*" And De Lacy was so astonished at the unexpected summons that he went. For weeks after Tip made herself a nuisance by her ceaseless repetition of the joke.

When men come to William Eglinton's time of life, nearing forty, one dance much resembles another. But he did not say so, as Amabel rapturously gasped: "Isn't this the very jolliest ball you ever were at? And doesn't Alice look nice?"

"She does—sweet!" answered the big man under his breath. And from under his thick brows he looked across the polished floor of the saloon. How exquisite an incarnation she was of a fresh English girl. From her warmly golden head, its hair dressed to perfection (for in that art Alice excelled), to those most nimble and well-shapen feet just peeping out in their black satin slippers. Her black dress, too, revealed and heightened the milk-white splendor of neck and bosom, of beautifully rounded arms. ("Why, she is a beauty! What a blind owl I have been not to see it before," he said to himself.)

"How do you like my frock?" Tip spread out complacently a miniature garment of white gossamer and what William supposed was "lacy stuff." Then impulsively, "I'll tell you a secret. It cost just as much as Alice's gown. Just fancy! But then she

was going to have twice as pretty a one, only all of a sudden she changed and got that cheap thing. Cousin Charlotte was awfully vexed, and can't think why Alice got stingy. But I know—for she lost a lot of money quite lately. Only as she'd promised me a really nice frock, she would not let me suffer." (In an important tone of confidence.)

"Really? How was that?"

The question came with such sudden awakened interest, in peremptory command, that poor little Tip started. Then she faltered, looking greatly ashamed of herself:

"Oh—I forgot. I wasn't to tell anybody."

("I thought as much," growled Eglinton into his beard.) "Well, mind you don't tell anybody else, and I'll count as nobody," he said, kindly. Then pulling out an almost blank dance programme he counted it over for the third time.

Five—six more tedious dances till number seven, opposite which he had scrawled the letter A. The rest was a blank. Tip looked also over his arm. "I'll dance with you again," she offered, generously, "whenever I haven't anyone else."

"That's a bargain," said her partner, rising. "You'll find me if you want me. I shall be holding on to a door-post watching the dancers."

Watching one of them would have been more truthful. Dance after dance William Eglinton found himself only following the revolutions of a golden head. How winsome it looked from each

point of view, how light the enticing figure held by the lucky arm of now this, now that partner. And how the watcher envied these individuals!

At last——

"My turn," Eglinton found himself saying to Alice with outward calm. He looked at her one moment, then away as he offered his arm. Every nerve thrilled through him at her touch; his heart was thumping against his ribs.

The girl did not guess that; how should she? Her face, all that evening had bravely carried due smiles with sweet resolve, now grew serious, and her heart chilled within her.

Only three turns of the saloon and Eglinton slackened, steered badly, and halted in awkward confusion.

"What was wrong?" asked Alice, in comforting reassurance. "You only imagine you dance badly. But you are quite pale."

"It is nothing. A touch of giddiness——" muttered Eglinton, who was really faint. "A little fresh air . . . if you'll excuse me a minute——"

"Come outside at once," said Alice brusquely, leading the way to the porch.

"Ah, that's better," breathed William, as the night breeze fanned his brow. Then in heartily grieved apology: "I'm no good at this game; never was much. It's a pity, as this may be our last dance together. Shall I find you another partner, as you will not like to lose your valse? Don't mind me. I'll take a turn round the garden."

"Am I a teetotum?" indignantly. "Let me come with you, unless——" bethinking herself,—“you have a doggy feeling: I mean wanting to be alone when you are out of sorts.”

"No, no. I am not so poor a dog as that. Pray come if you like—That means," with a feeble laugh masking a great inward greed of longing, "it is only too good of you. Do come."

So she went, only saying gently:

"Don't trouble to talk to me for awhile then. We are good enough friends for that."

Silently they went down the garden walks, taking a path through the feathery bamboo thicket that was known to both, for it ended in an open spot ringed by high tamarind trees. Just as they were on the point of entering this a woman's voice quite near uttered in passionate accents: "Engaged to her! That skim-milk, blanc-mange! Second-rate trash! Listen, my darling boy, which is the prettiest girl? That wooden doll or *me?*" There followed the sound of eager kisses, through which filtered with difficulty the words, "You—you!"

Alice, whose hand was resting on Eglinton's arm so lightly he had been wishing—vexed—he could feel its touch more, started forward, her grasp tightening to a clutch of steel. Hard by the nearest bamboos both saw the couple, looking close in each other's faces. A branch shadowed their features, but the brilliant moonlight showed a yellow and orange dress worn by the tall female

form, whose arms were interlaced round the neck of an officer in white mess uniform and crimson sash.

"Which of us sings the best, honey-boy? That—tuning-fork or your own Pyretha, the Kingston nightingale?"

"My own bird," came in what sounded like a sorrowful gasp.

"Which has the finest figure? Put your arms round me closer—closer; so. . . . Gracious goodness! Is that a duppy?"

Eglinton, dreading a scene, had silently tried to draw Alice back. But for once disregarding her counsellor, she let go his arm and stepped forward.

"Forgive me for interrupting you, Miss Fitzwilliam. But Mr. De Lacy was engaged to me for this next dance. Under the circumstances you two doubtless wish to remain partners—now and for life. Clarence, I release you from your engagement to marry me!"

"Alice! My heavens! Alice. . . . Let me explain. Let me speak to you a minute. Pyretha knows I can't afford to marry her. I told her so only last week," faltered the luckless youth.

"He cares for me all the same, you eavesdropper! Me! Me! Me!" came in storm-gusts from Pyretha. They could hear the breath drawn into her nostrils like the snorts of a furious horse.

"So I understand; and believe me I have no wish to stand in the way. If money is the obstacle to your joint happiness you had better explain" (this

to Pyretha) "that your father's name was Williamson, which Mr. De Lacy may not know. And you, Clarence, have my full permission to tell my intentions to Miss Fitzwilliam as to the Two Rivers estate. Further, I expect you both—both—to come to dinner to-morrow as already arranged, when you and your cousins may hear of something else to your advantage." Alice ended, and the next instant the bamboo thicket swallowed her up, so swiftly she hastened along the path. But Eglinton followed as fast, and in the dark caught her arm with both hands, thinking to support her.

"This has been too great a shock. Let me find you a seat—fetch you some water. My poor, poor Alice." No brother's voice could have been kinder; no brother's so tender in pity.

"Come away—away. That is what I want!" And Alice, fleeing on as if her swelling heart impelled her like a steam-engine in her body, instead of being upheld was rather held back by the strong grasp that did not loose. On to the other side of the garden, round a corner of the stables, where the shingle roof and akee trees threw sharp shadows upon the moonlit grass. Alice stopped and raised both hands with a low cry of relief:

"There! It is over! I am free, free again." Then turning upon Eglinton, who released her slowly in amazement: "You cannot blame me now for wanting to break my promise, as you did the other day. You heard! You saw——"

"There is some great mistake. Did you not mean your promise to your dead uncle? That after all you wished to keep the treasure and property."

"No—no! A thousand times no! As if I would break my word for mere money. How could you so misjudge me? It was that I longed to be free from him—Clarence. And it was you who taught me that I did not—could not love him."

"What can you mean?"

"Yes; you. How could I respect him and lean on him? Could I trust his loyalty, goodness, unselfishness utterly? Did I turn to him for advice and help and—and comfort . . . always?" The girl had begun bravely, thrilled with the deep emotion of this crisis in her life, but her voice faltered and broke down at the end.

There was a moment's silence, because William's heart was beating so loudly, and the blood surging in his ears. His whole body trembled, but he uttered, half-choked:

"Alice! My love!"

It was enough. Heart answered heart, and the girl gave a low cry of rapture. Next moment they were in each other's arms, and both felt as if a little of heaven had come down on earth and environed them.

When they returned to the house, Tip, who was watching in the doorway, clutched at them with her tenacious small fingers.

"What has happened? You two look—oh, like

as if you had both got a present of the sun and the moon."

"I have." "And I have," mingled in joyous whispered answer. Eglinton stooped and uttered a few words in Amabel's ear. But he and even Alice were unprepared for the screech of eldritch joy that followed, bringing the captain waddling with Charlotte hanging on his arm to ask: "What is up?" In a twinkling they guessed for themselves; however, the particular twinkling, said the skipper afterwards, of his friend William's eye. And they exclaimed in congratulatory undertones: "We said so—we knew it from the beginning."

CHAPTER XLV.

"DEAR me! This is going off pretty well. I was so afraid it would be a difficult dinner," murmured Mrs. Dundas to her Benjamin next evening, glancing round the table. Her delicately darkened eyebrows that had been raised for the last hour in timid apprehension, now lowered their arches, and she permitted herself to use her fan in a Watteau-like still gaiety.

"Ah, you shuffled the cards like a born genius. There would have been wigs on the green if you had not fixed the pairs in their chairs so cleverly," was Blower's full-mouthed whisper. And his setting sun visage shone in admiration upon his betrothed.

Charlotte, indeed, mysteriously calling Mrs. Wright to her assistance that afternoon, had given much giggling and ingenuity to solving the puzzle of how the different engaged couples could each sit together without awkward nearness to another pair. Pyretha was the dreaded firebrand. So John Williamson was placed beside her, Amabel condescending to be his companion. And Mrs. Wright, who went in with Mr. Dunn, undertook to guard Clar-

ence on the other side. The latter was very pale; but both he and Pyretha looked defiant, conversing markedly with each other in undertones or whispers.

"I didn't bring momma," Miss Fitzwilliam curtly explained to Captain Blower, "because she was no use. My young man takes care of me; and as to business, I look after my own."

During dinner, Clarence glanced twice or thrice furtively but hard at Alice. Mrs. Wright saw this at last, and in a rather cruel spirit of mischief said: "Does she not look charming? And Mr. Eglinton so distinguished. Have you congratulated those two yet on their engagement?"

"What? . . . No. . . . I don't believe it!" For a minute Clarence looked so haggard that the little woman's heart smote her. But, remembering recent events, she answered, bluntly:

"Why should you be surprised? You got engaged yourself last night by all accounts."

Clarence answered in a shocked tone under his breath: "Great Scott! He's done it for her money. But I did think she would have seen through him. He's a nobody—a beggar."

"My husband thinks him the most perfect gentleman he ever met; and I think Miss Bamfield will be a very happy woman," returned Mrs. Wright, hotly.

Clarence drained off his glass in silence, and each time Martin offered him more wine he took it.

"Ladies and gentlemen," gave out Blower after dessert, in the roar of a well-fed lion: "Most of us

have an inkling, I believe, as to why some of you have been asked here this evening by Miss Bamfield. It is pleasure and business combined. I know no more about the details than anyone present—excepting the young lady herself, who is fair in all senses of the word, and probably” (this in a sly tone) “the gentleman she has chosen as her mainstay in life, and whom, having known him for years, I can assure her is the most upright man and best friend Benjamin Blower ever shook fists with——”

Here the captain’s speech was interrupted by a burst of applause, in which only De Lacy and his Pyretha did not join; glancing, on the contrary, at each other with derisive smiles.

“I say,” continued the spokesman, looking round genially in turn at all present except the unresponsive couple, whose attitude he took in with the tail of his eye.

“I say, all I do know is that my friend, Mr. Dunn, has given me a hint he has a document to read that may take some time. Likewise, I know everybody wants to know all about it. Lastly, I know Miss Alice has taken a journey here only to perform an act of restitution, according to her conscience, so I say, God bless her, and may she and her chosen husband be as happy as a King and Queen, and here’s their healths!”

Everyone drank this; most with enthusiasm. Pyretha with an air of grudging approval. Clarence just tasted his glass.

"And in postscript, my friends," roared Blower, "if the lady who, I regret to say, is still called Mrs. Dundas, will signal graciously to her sex to skip into the saloon, those of us who can drink enough wine in ten minutes will toddle after them. Anybody who pleases may stay behind."

Presently William Eglinton, with an air of gallant courtesy which wonderfully became him, led Alice to the huge chair in which her planter ancestors used to sit, and that stood below the portrait of Alice Carnegie. The rest settled themselves in expectant groups.

In Alice's cheeks two red spots appeared which William privately thought like aces of hearts. They saw her turn to Eglinton with a charming diffidence as in entreaty. He plainly urged her with encouragement, so she began: "When my late uncle was dying he said something to me. It was about a promise, a Bible, and a cupboard. That was all I understood. But—please, Mr. Eglinton will tell the rest." Alice was no public speaker.

On the other hand, William Eglinton, who at once took up her dropped speech in his pleasant voice, told the story pithily, briefly, and with tact. Even Pyretha, who sat smoldering, could not quarrel with the delicate way in which the relations of her ancestress Rintinella with William Bamfylde was conveyed to the audience. Mr. Dunn then took up the paper written by the old rebel and stumbled slowly through the crabbed manuscript, interrupted by ir-

repressible ejaculations from the heirs. He ended, looking over his spectacles and hemming significantly.

"We find here that Rintinella mentions heirs only of the name of Williamson."

"I'll drop Fitzwilliam," Pyretha screamed, starting up in excitement. "John—Cousin John—I'm an orphan, remember. You'll give me my rights, won't you? I don't care for the land. You can have my share if you give me its value in the treasure."

"Why, now, that's an idea," said John, in his good-natured voice, smiling round. "We'll make it a bargain, Pyretha, and you may get the best of it. But no matter; mamma and I have enough for ourselves, have we not?"

"The dear Lord has blest us, my son. What is in your mind, I will not go against," said Mrs. Williamson, in her staid, devout manner.

Pyretha still stood, flushed, her flashing eyes fixed on Alice, who bore the look light-heartedly.

"You expect me to thank you. Well, I don't! Generosity, forsooth! You and yours have kept me and mine out of our own for a hundred years. Hasn't this treasure laid idle in the ground all that time? I expect interest for it, however much it may be, I warn you."

There was a silence around, as if the hearers were appalled at the girl's violence. Then Mr. Dunn spoke dryly:

"I am afraid you expect more than you are likely to get, young lady."

"Speaking for myself," said John Williamson, in a troubled voice, "my conscience pricks me that our great-grandfather was an unjust steward. Else how could I own the estate at Moneague; and you, Pyretha, the fortune which you enjoy? Already I have said as much to Miss Bamfield, and mamma and self give her humble and hearty thanks that she refuses to inquire into any ill deeds done before my time as agent."

"Let bygones be bygones," put in Alice, with a cheerful nod.

"That should apply to both sides," suggested Eglinton, consulting Mr. Dunn by look. "If Miss Fitzwilliam is so desirous of justice as to interest she should also be prepared to refund whatever appears to have been filched from Carnegie Pen in former days."

Pyretha glared at the speaker.

"The carriages are ready!" announced Alice, cutting short further discussion.

"It is full moon, so let us dig to-night. That is why you were all asked to come in morning dress."

"The spades and a pickaxe are stowed snugly in my buggy," chuckled the captain. Then to Williamson, "If we got any of our fellows to dig, John, you and I would have no peace in future from treasure-seekers. They would dig holes up to our very doors."

All approved this except De Lacy, who by way of protest against his invitation, sported an elaborate smoking jacket.

"What rot! I'm not going to turn navvy."

"If you won't, I will. So there! It's my treasure, and if you don't want a share in it I can keep it for myself," scoffed Pyretha. She was fairly tingling with eagerness, and in no mood for trifling.

"Forgive me, darling. To please you, I'll do any mortal thing." Clarence's suave apology was uttered in so suddenly cringing a tone that Alice sighed, and William Eglinton was shocked. So all started in the same order as they had sat at dinner.

It wanted half an hour to midnight. Under the deep shadow of the cotton tree, most of the party were sitting or standing. The carriage lamps shone like footlights on the ground, illumining the theatre of action, which was a fairly deep trench dug from the roots of the forest giant in a straight line to the nearest point to the river. Two men were digging, Williamson and Eglinton, whilst at stony parts the skipper helped them with a pickaxe, priding himself on being still as strong as the youngest at delivering swinging blows. De Lacy had begun the work, but he soon was so unmistakably fagged that his old tutor in pity offered to relieve him.

"All right," was the sullen answer, for Clarence felt loath to accept any favor at his rival's hands. "You're used to this kind of job from tea-planting, I suppose; I wasn't brought up to it."

"A very good thing for you if you had been," exclaimed Wright and Blower, who overheard the remark, both using almost identical words. None of the other men, so they said afterwards, would lend Clarence a hand; they were too irritated with the young fellow's airs. Each of them had pressed vainly their help on Williamson, who refused with a laugh and kept on steadily throwing out spadefuls of earth as the skipper called out in praise, "like—like anything!" ("Jehoshaphat! I nearly said like a nigger," he whispered to William Eglinton, who courteously returned, "Silly old sperm whale!")

Alice, though she would have liked a little more of her William's company, was yet blithe as a bird, and deeply interested. Still she avoided private talk with either Pyretha or Clarence. And the others, guessing this, made themselves a bodyguard. Tip hooked on to her arm with bat-like fingers; whilst Dunn and Wright told traditions concerning the famous cotton-tree. In some of the worst negro risings the trysting-place had been under its shadow, and during the religious craze of Myalism the fanatics who believed the power of flying had come upon them, used to roost on its branches like fowl, or flap over the ground in strange antics.

Meantime, Mrs. Dundas and Mrs. Wright, as kindred spirits, were crouched over a spirit-lamp and tea-basket in the background, for, as they assured each other, "a cup would be so refreshing." But Pyretha stood over the trench, not stirring save by

inches as the work advanced. She seemed rigid but for an occasional quiver that passed over her body, was silent but for an occasional word flung at the diggers in fierce impatience or jibing when a root or stones barred their progress.

While Clarence ceased working he stood beside her, putting his arm ostentatiously round her waist. Pyretha hardly heeded him. She remained with her eyes like search-lights fixed, their balls showing white rings.

"You'd think the girl was a ghoul and we grave-diggers," growled Blower once to Eglinton.

In strong contrast of attitude Mrs. Williamson kept coming softly now and then to her son's side, bending to entreat, low: "John, do not overtask your strength in quest of vanity. Remember, the love of money is the root of all evil. You are not hungering after riches, I pray, my son."

"No, mamma. But I'm rather thirsty. The captain said there was some whisky and soda water in his buggy. Perhaps you would bring me a drink," confided Williamson, in the tone of a good boy, certain of his mother's approval.

None of the men who overheard this colloquy chaffed when Mrs. Williamson went off as a matter of course to obey her son's wish. Coming back she said in her serious, sweet voice:

"I hope it is mixed to your liking, dear."

Three-quarters of an hour they had now been digging without success. Twice their spades had met

wood, but the excitement was shortlived—only a larger tree-root than usual. Now they were on the river's edge—and the disappointed silence was only broken by an occasional whisper of doubt from Wright or Dunn, unbelievers both.

The captain clambered out of the trench, tired and cross. "I'll do no more. I've a twinge of gout in my leg. Stay there!" This last adjuration was to his pickaxe which he struck into the side of the ditch with a final mighty stroke delivered in dudgeon. All heard a ring as of iron meeting iron.

"Hallo! It's there—it's there!" and forgetting gout the skipper renewed his strokes on the spot. Without doubt his blows fell on the side of an iron chest, soon exposed to view.

"Give me this, man alive," exclaimed Clarence, snatching the spade from Eglinton. "I must get the stuff out for Pyretha!"

But before he spoke Pyretha herself sprang down into the trench and was tearing, clawing away the earth with her own fingers with so covetous a greed in her face that Alice thrilled with repulsion, and at her side Mrs. Williamson fairly shuddered.

There! it was out. Between them the men lifted the chest on to the open ground, and all crowded around. Even by moonlight it seemed a rusty object of great age. The lamps held round showed an evidently Spanish chest with long hinges and three locks, that had been wrenched asunder at some time with violence. The chest had later evidently been

tied round with hide thongs now mouldered, and falling to pieces.

"Who'll open it? Only the rust holds it," said Blower, looking round.

"Me! Me! It's mine," and Pyretha thrust the others aside, dropping on her knees. She had strong hands but their strength was taxed. Then, succeeding, the girl gave a cry of triumph, forcing up the rusty, groaning lid. Her hands plunged in to grasp the contents.

What was this? Slowly, falteringly, they brought up the only thing within the chest, held it to the encircling blaze of lamps and ring of eager eyes. It was a small image of black wood; inexpressibly hideous. Its white bead eyes and mouth, a daub of red ochre tarnished by time, seemed to grin derisively at its owner.

"Obi! It is Obi magic!" shrieked Pyretha, dropping the thing in mingled terror and fury. The disappointment was too great. She staggered, reeled back in a kind of convulsion, and was caught by Williamson, who laid her on the ground, her head on his mother's lap, who strove to quiet the writhing figure.

"Water!" said Alice, promptly. And whilst the others were asking themselves how to fetch it, she was dipping her handkerchief in the stream; William hastening to help contributed a larger one. The cold touch of these doubtless revived Pyretha, for she roused, struggled up to sit on some carriage cush-

ions. Then, in a last paroxysm of fury, she railed upon Alice: "Thief! You've taken good care to rob the chest before you pretended to find it! You and your beggarly tutor."

Clarence broke the pitying or aghast silence of the hearers in a tone of cold disgust.

"Oh, shut up! Don't be a fool. You know well enough it took a pickaxe to get out that blessed legacy of yours. It is not Miss Bamfield's fault if you are no great heiress."

"Anyway, you won't throw me over because I'm not," wailed Pyretha, with pleading and defiance mingled in her cry. "You said you wanted me for myself only an hour ago—you said so ever so many times coming here in the buggy, when I said you were fonder of me after you heard of my fortune. And you said it was enough for you to be Lord Eaglemont's heir. You can't deny it."

"Well: why should I?" was the sulky answer.

"You should, because it is not true," broke in William Eglinton, in a voice of restrained thunder no one present had ever heard from him before. "Several times already I have warned you to entertain no such hope, and told you distinctly lately you would inherit little or nothing from your cousin."

"Yes: you were always interfering. But I'll stand it no longer," retorted Clarence, stung to the quick by the exposure of the false claims he had almost duped himself into believing. "Who are you, pray, to know so jolly much about it? What right have you to say so? Answer me that."

The answer came quietly, yet it had the effect of a thunder-clap.

"I am Lord Eaglemont."

* * * * *

"Alice—my queen—forgive me for keeping you a whole day in ignorance after our betrothal," pleaded Eaglemont later, when alone with his promised wife. "It was so sweet to feel myself loved as the poor tutor, the tea-planter who failed. But in any case I meant to tell you my real name as we drove home from the treasure hunt."

And Alice, looking in his rugged face now beautified in her eyes and greatly beloved, forgave him while his arms girt her fondly. Only she wondered:

"How did you keep the secret so long?"

"Partly from habit. For some years I have travelled under the name of Eglinton, disliking to use my title amongst strangers. My old friends know that."

"Well," said Alice, with a low laugh of intense happiness, "let us sometimes do so still."

THE END.

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